

George Kazakov • Maria Donkova

# HISTORY 8.





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George Kazakov • Maria Donkova

# HISTORY 8.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# 1

### A NEW BEGINNING – JESUS

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#### **A** The chosen people of God – the Jews

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It took the ancient peoples more than ten centuries to create the magnificent Greek world. It combined the oriental concept of power and the sublime, the Greek notion of beauty, and Roman ideas of social utility, law, and justice. During the Roman empire, the values of Greek philosophy were universally embraced by those peoples who found themselves, despite varying traditions, part of the empire.

There was one ancient people, however, the Jewish people, who resisted Greek philosophy. Often forced to live without an independent state of their own, on not clearly defined territories, and without a ruler or a temple of their own, the Jews attached special importance to the relationship with their God. Unlike other peoples, the Jews believed in one god (Jehovah): the maker of heaven and earth, father of all people and guardian of his people. There was a special 'bond' between Jehovah and the Jewish people. God had revealed to the Jews his intention to save humanity by first saving the Jewish people – the chosen people of God. For this reason, the Jews had to follow steadfastly the path to salvation pointed out for them by Jehovah.

Once entrusted with this mission, the Jewish people would always be led by their God. By order of God, eighteen centuries before Christ, one of the

Jewish leaders, Abraham, led his people to the promised land of Palestine. One hundred years later, hunger forced the Jews to leave that land and move to Egypt. Because of the violent oppression they suffered there in the 14th century B.C., that period of their history is called "Egyptian slavery." At that crucial moment, God once again came to their rescue. During the Exodus to Palestine, while they were crossing Mount Sinai, Jehovah appeared to their leader, Moses, and gave him the Law. The Jews promised to always observe the Law (the Ten Commandments of God) and God helped them return to the Promised Land. Pesah – the commemoration of the deliverance of the ancient Hebrews from slavery in Egypt – became one of the most important Jewish religious holidays.

Soon, strict observance of the Law apparently brought prosperity to the ancient Hebrews. They enjoyed a glorious two-century period, when all Hebrew tribes were united in one state under one ruler. In the 10th century B.C., under the rule of King Solomon, the Hebrews built in ancient Jerusalem a sacred edifice for worshipping Jehovah: the Golden Temple. The tables with the Mosaic law were kept in the Temple and it became the center of the Hebrew world. That explains why the Jewish people always persistently rebuilt their temple every time different conquerors would destroy it. Later on, wherever



historical fate would take the Jews all over the world, they would always build a temple similar to the one in Jerusalem.

The glorious name of King Solomon made the Jewish people think the time had come for God to fulfill his promise. Prophecies for the coming of the Kingdom of God soon became more frequent. But Jehovah's will was different. By the end of the eighth century B.C., the chosen people fell victim to powerful conquerors. For eight hundred years the Jews would struggle to get free from captivity, but their rebellions would be cruelly crushed by Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians. Things did not change much even after 63 B.C., when Palestine became part of the Roman Empire.

Like most of the conquerors who enforced their power over the Jewish people, the Romans too had been compelled to show a certain tolerance toward those "peculiar subjects." For instance, the Jews were exempted from military service because it was against their religion. The position of the Holy City of Jerusalem was tacitly respected. In the name of peace, Caesarea was made the capital of Roman Palestine instead of Jerusalem. All internal Jewish affairs were solved under Mosaic law. The judgments of the Jewish Sanhedrin were in force and they were countersigned by the Roman governor of Palestine.

In order to observe Jehovah's legacy, a system of worship was created which emphasized differences between the Jewish and other peoples. The idea of being favored by God, the management of the Jewish society according to religious canons, observing the Sabbath, banning mixed marriages, and prohibiting certain foods; these customs made the Jews a strongly conservative ethnic community unyielding to external influences. In the Jews' life

there was one God, one Temple and one book: the Old Testament (in Hebrew, 'Torah'). The Torah is a sacred book, law, Jewish teaching, a history of the Hebrew people, fiction, and a prophecy for the future.

No trial or hardship could weaken the Jews' faith. However, their sufferings strongly colored their idea of the promised salvation. In return for eight centuries of humiliation, they began to want God to send them a victorious king who would overwhelmingly defeat their enemies. They wanted to acquire eternal power over all who had humiliated them until then. Their desire so dazzled them that they did not recognize the long expected deliverer who had come to them, sent by God to free them. He did not bear any resemblance to the brilliant, strong, king of the Jews they had been awaiting.

## **B** Jesus Christ – the legacy of faith and love

Because of the numerous false (self-proclaimed) messiahs or because of his human form, when Jesus Christ was born in Palestine, the Jews did not believe he was the Son of God, the awaited Messiah. As it is recorded in the New Testament, that doubt lasted throughout his earthly life. By the time he was thirty years of age, Jesus went preaching among the Jews. He preached about God's desire to save the human race because he loved them and was willing to forgive them original sin, grant them immortality, and open the doors to heaven. But if they wanted to ascend there, people had to truly believe in God and his Son. They were not given the hope that God would save all; they were to love their fellow-men in the same way God loved them. Only then, in reward for their true faith, they would be granted eternal life.



Soon a small circle of twelve disciples, the apostles, gathered around Jesus. To make them believe him, Jesus performed a number of miracles: he turned water into wine, brought Lazarus back to life, and healed deaf, blind, and lame people. But he never stopped preaching that the greatest miracle was faith, the road to eternal life. After witnessing the miracles, many people believed his teachings. Others, however, considered him a threat to public order.

During a visit to Jerusalem for the Pesah, the big Jewish religious holiday, Jesus was captured and brought before a hastily convened Sanhedrin. He was condemned to be crucified because he called himself God and the Son of God. Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, ordered the crucifixion. Christ was crucified as if a most dangerous rebel against the empire. Having made their ultimate challenge, the Jews held their breath and waited. If Jesus was the true Messiah, he would not die. A miracle had to happen to rescue him from death. Instead, they saw Jesus suffer like an ordinary man. But even the suffering could not affect Jesus' love for the people. While dying because of their treason, he said, "Lord, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing."

That ended a misunderstanding. Because of his love, God had sent to the Jews his Son in human form. But dazzled by their desire to be requited for their humiliation, they refused to trust the humble and suffering messenger of God. In order to undeceive people, God offered his son as a sacrifice. Where words did not succeed in showing the road to salvation, Jesus left his deeds. The few who believed in him were assured of his resurrection. On the third day of the Savior's death, his disciples found his tomb empty. They proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. That last proof of his divine origin finally convinced them of the truth

of his teaching. Here begins the story of a new culture, one that received from the Savior its first three weapons: faith, hope and love.



## The Jerusalem Christian Community

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It is recorded in the New Testament that after the Resurrection the apostles remained in Jerusalem and continued to congregate in the expectation that Jesus Christ's promise would come true. He had told them they would be inspired by his divine power, and that they too, would be able to save people. Everyone thought this would be a miracle.

And the miracle happened fifty days after the death of Christ, during a big agricultural holiday. A violent wind came down from the sky together with flames from a divine fire that brushed each apostle. After that the apostles came out and talked to the people. Each one of them had received the wonderful power to speak a different language so that all could understand what they said. Apostle Paul's voice rose above everyone and announced that God's promise had come true. The ones who believed in the miracle became the first Christians. That was the beginning of the Christian Church\* which continued Jesus' salvation mission among people.

The first Christians were Jews and they zealously preached Christ's teachings among their kind. Nevertheless, they continued to observe strictly Jewish religious rites and the Temple was still their place of learning and prayer just as it was to all other Jews. But the Christian community in Jerusalem had its own rites, called sacraments\*. The rites – for example, baptism by immersion in or sprinkling with water, or sharing the consecrated bread between all believers – resembled certain Jewish ones but the meaning differed. The Christian sacra-



ment was the time of spiritual union with God. It conferred some specific grace upon those who received it only if they truly believed in God. The new believers' road to salvation began with baptism. In a miraculous way baptism cleansed one from sin so Christians believed they were beginning a new life.

The Eucharist was the main sacrament of the ancient Christian community. It is believed to have been instituted by Jesus Christ. Like Jesus and his disciples, believers gathered for a common meal which reminded them of the Last Supper. Christians thanked God for having sacrificed Christ. After that they would share the bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Jesus. By taking the Eucharist, each believer shared the life and sufferings of Christ.

## **D** The new man – the Christian

The world barely noticed the emerging Jerusalem Christian community. That small community, however, considered themselves the "salt and light of the earth," called to save humanity. Love was the most frequently used word in the ancient Christian scriptures. The first Christians interpreted the word literally. To live in love meant to them living together, caring about all who were in need.

Each Christian considered his fellow creatures as brothers and considered himself called to take care of their souls and bodies. A supreme manifestation of such love was the third Chris-

tian sacrament: penance. To repent and confess one's sins to God meant to regret one's wrongdoings and even assume responsibility for not preventing one's fellow-men from sinning. It was not by chance that sacrament literally meant a "turning point" in one's personal life. Most thought that believers changed the course of their lives and started living a new, more virtuous one.

Christians, repenting to God for the wrongdoings of others and calling them "brothers," were to turn human civilization by turning their own lives. That is how they became, in a way, "new people." What united them more than any other earthly bond and power was love inspired by God. And that was the firm foundation of the new society, represented by the Christian community.

The simplicity of Christian preaching and the promise of salvation soon brought many believers to the Church. The new religion spread beyond the boundaries of Jewish society and Apostle Paul was the first to convert numerous pagan\* tribes to the new faith. It was then that the question arose whether non-observers of the Jewish law would make good Christians.

For that reason all the apostles convened in Jerusalem in 49 A.D. where it was decided that there was no reason why Christian Jews and Gentiles, converted by Paul, should not be members of the Christian Church. No earthly law or rite could make the believers different because God had promised to save every man. The only condition was faith, and faith was one for all Christians, irrespective of their race, social status, traditions, sex, or color.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. What was the historical fate of the Jewish people – revise from your year 7 book.
2. What distinguished the Jews from other ancient peoples?
3. What legacy did Jesus Christ leave to people?
4. Which were the sacraments of the first Christians and what is their meaning?
5. What were the differences between the Christian and other ancient societies?



## FACES OF HISTORY:

### **Paul the Apostle and the break away from Jewish religion**

Of all the apostles, we know most about Paul. In a certain manner, the "case of Paul" remains central in human history. By an irony of fate, Saul, the militant opposer of Christian creed, later adopted the name of Paul and became one of the Church apostles. It is to him that Christianity owes its liberation from Jewish religious restraints.

Saul, a Jew, was born in Tarsus (a town in Asia Minor) and scrupulously studied the law of Moses with the intention of becoming a rabbi. His religious upbringing made him oppose Christianity, and he persecuted the Christians. In his contemporaries' words, Paul "breathed menace and murder"; he used to "get into people's houses and drag out Christian men and women and take them to jail." Once, during one such persecution, while hurrying on his way to Damascus, a miracle happened which changed his life. A blinding light surrounded him and he heard the voice of God. He was punished with blindness, and it was then that he converted to Christ's faith. Three days later he recovered his sight and was baptized in the name of Jesus, adopting the name of Paul.

Later, in Antioch, the apostles initiated him in the teachings of Christian

doctrine and Paul devoted all the rest of his life to it. First he started preaching among the Jews in Asia Minor in the 1st century A.D. Wherever the Jews rejected him, he approached and preached among the non-Jews. His preaching won the Church many converts. In the newly converted communities Paul appointed presbyters \* and in this way a number of Christian Churches were set up. Paul's successful missions to the Gentiles raised the question whether, like the Jews who observed strictly the law, non-Jews too could receive the grace of salvation. There were strong disagreements over that issue, which caused Paul great pain.

For many long years Paul travelled on missions throughout the Roman Empire. We know about three of his big missions. After his first mission in Asia Minor, he went to the Balkans: Salonika, Corinth, Athens. On his third mission, he went westwards to Rome and Spain. In Rome, he was arrested and sent to trial. He died a martyr in Rome in 67 (?) A.D. However, that is not important. The most important point is that Christianity had started on its way from Jerusalem, capital of a small people, and had spread to Rome, capital of the world, transforming the world with its new principles.



## THE DECLINE OF THE ANCIENT WORLD (2ND – 3RD CENTURIES A.D. )



### The big confrontation: the citizen and power

There is no doubt today that the emergence of Christianity has marked the further history of humanity. During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, however, that fact was not so obvious. People then were more impressed by the Roman Empire and its power over the vast territories of Europe, Asia and Africa. The Roman Empire had achieved its ancient dream of uniting the whole cultured world under one rule. Rome controlled the Mediterranean world. In a way, the Romans' claim they ruled 'the whole world', was not totally unjustified. But what was more provocative was whether one city, Rome, could rule the world by its own means alone.

The secret of Rome's success were its citizens. By tradition, Roman citizens participated in the government of the city. They had civil and military power. Whenever required, they armed themselves at their own expense and went fighting for the interests of Rome on their own free will and without expecting any remuneration. Rome owed its rule over almost the whole ancient world to the uncompromising decisiveness of its army of armed Roman citizens.

The vast boundaries of the Empire needed defending and there were not enough Roman citizens for that purpose. That is why in the 1st century B.C., non-

Roman citizens were also included in the Roman army, which became an attractive place for people from the provinces to make a career. In this way, many foreigners acquired Roman citizenship and rights. Although there were no other means to increase the army's strength, those reforms weakened the tradition. The Roman people and the Roman army were no longer one and the same. Roman citizens no longer considered service in the army as a matter of honour, regarding it more and more as an unjustified burden; they no longer thought avoiding it a disgrace.

The true gap between Roman citizens and the army emerged after the middle of the 2nd century, when the Roman army started suffering defeats. That not only stopped the flow of gains from conquest but also turned the support of the considerable military forces into a heavy financial burden for Rome's treasury. At that moment, emperors played a decisive role. By reason of their dualistic role as 'prime citizens' and leaders of the army, during the first three centuries A.D. emperors were the force that ensured the balance between the army and Rome. After several attempts at reaching compromise between the citizens and the army, in 212 A.D., Emperor Caracalla issued an edict proclaiming as Roman citizens all free people within the boundaries of the Empire. The aim was to restore the balance of power by re-establishing the unity between the Roman army and the



Roman people. That balance, however, turned out to be very delicate.

In the middle of the 3rd century, the Empire faced another difficult problem which nearly destroyed it - the barbarians. The perturbations they caused proved the need for a change in the organization of power in the Empire.

## **B** The Empire and the Barbarians: a story of discord

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Rome had been aware of the Barbarians for a long time. It had long cherished the victories of Caesar and Augustus over the Germans and for a long period, the attitude toward the Barbarians had been limited to the contempt with which civilized Rome regarded these primitive people. Barbarians were uncultured: they had no cities, did not observe any laws, did not communicate with other people, and fought "without order," leaving only pillage behind them.

The Barbarians, on the other hand, aspired more and more after Rome. They were attracted by the security and order in the Empire and the possibility of settling in the more fertile lands in the south of Europe. Actually, they were willing to become Roman citizens by the only means they practiced well: the sword.

In the first century, a fortified rampart was built all along the northern border of the Empire. The attempt at stopping the sudden attacks of the Barbarians made Rome dread rather than despise them. However, the rampart was hardly efficient; it was not fortifications that defended Rome but its army of citizen-soldiers. The Barbarian invasions could not be stopped, and by the middle of the 3rd century, they had become so frequent, that in fact there was permanent fighting along the northern borders. Most dangerous of all were the numerous Germanic tribes of Goths, Franks,

Alamannis, and some others. In 276, the Franks and Alamannis ravaged Gaul, Spain, and even North Italy. The damage was enormous, the border ramparts proved no obstacle, and the Roman army could not repel so many invaders. Obviously, the Empire had to find a new strategy against the Barbarians. Since it could not stop them penetrating the Empire, it had to act in accordance with their demands.

Large groups of Barbarians began settling in the deserted border regions of the Empire. In exchange for the right to work the land, the Barbarians agreed to protect Roman borders. Several Germanic tribes became "allies" of the Empire. The military units of those allies remained under the command of their Barbarian commanders but were expected to fight for the interests of Rome. Some Barbarians joined the Roman army as mercenaries. The 'barbarization' of the army further widened the gap between the army and Roman citizens. It became a source of constant tension in Roman society, which not only felt alienated from its army but also dreaded it eventually turning against Rome itself.

In a number of cases those fears had been justified. In spite of their desire to become part of Rome, Barbarians stuck to their traditions and applied them not only in solving their internal affairs. Each time the Empire would weaken, they were ready to enforce their conditions, arms in hand. But the Empire badly needed the Barbarians, who supplied the Roman army with a regular flow of recruits.

## **C** The way out by force: Diocletian

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When Diocletian (284-305) took over, the Empire had weakened so much that its integrity was under threat. The only possible solution was to reform the power structure. Diocletian risked break-



ing the tradition. He moved his capital from Rome to the theater of war and turned his back on the role of 'first citizen' in order to fully devote himself to the role of princeps. By getting out of Rome, the emperor put himself above city traditions and relied only on the army. To save the Empire he concentrated all power, both civilian and military, in the hands of one person: the emperor.

A new administrative hierarchy was established directly subordinate to the emperor. Court officials acquired more power. The "guards of the sacred chamber" and the "sacred wardrobe," and the "friends" of the emperor, become political figures of state importance. The Empire was divided in four parts, or prefectures, and further subdivided into smaller administrative units. Civil and military power were separated and the people in charge were appointed by the emperor himself.

The aim of this new administration was to ensure regular income for the support of the army. The Empire could not rely any more on the irregular and insufficient gains from successful wars. Taxes were introduced with special laws. The people, who used to contribute voluntarily for their city, were now forced to submit to the emperor and provide for an army and an administration they no longer participated in. City magistrates were responsible with their own property for the tax to Rome and often, the application of the taxation laws ended in their total ruin. To avoid the fulfillment of these new obligations, the magistrates very often retired to their properties in the country. Many other citizens did the same.

The only possible way out of that situation was to force the citizens to fulfill their obligations. The only person with the power to carry out that was the emperor. Diocletian issued new laws by which the obligations of the magistrates became hereditary and nonfulfillment of obligations was punished with imprisonment. A number of similar laws were is-

sued for people of different occupations in order to stop the depopulation of towns. For the first time in history, obliged to pay taxes and punished severely for non-compliance, Roman citizens were turned into subjects, placed at the disposal of their ruler. The emperor was more frequently called 'dominus' (master) and he governed the Empire as an absolute monarch with the help of a professional army of mercenaries.

Later, that system of administration was called a Dominate. The Dominate stabilized the Empire by ensuring both legal and political unity, but it failed to solve the cultural problem of Roman society. After being turned into subjects, Roman citizens felt wholly estranged from the power structure. This new situation was not typical of their concept about the world. The resulting crisis became visible most clearly in religion. Doubts about onetime gods, and seeking new religious support and new understanding of the world, became an essential part of the spiritual life of Roman subjects. In the second and third centuries the cult of the emperor was still formally observed, but syncretic\* cults of Mithras, Orpheus and Isis also enjoyed big popularity. They reconciled different forms of belief and answered to a certain degree the intense demand for a uniform idea, common to all religions, which explained the co-existence of so many different people within the boundaries of one state.

## **D** The Empire and the Church

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The ancient world had no such organization of people even remotely similar to the Christian Church. According to Christians, their Church was created by God and given to the people to help them find salvation. Believers thought they were called to serve God and save the human race. All Christians submitted to God's will and tried to live in love with each



other so that the blessing of salvation would reach all people. The requirements for pious living applied to their daily lives, outside church as well as inside.

The fact that the Church was God's creation was clearly expressed in Church hierarchy. Each Christian community was directed by a bishop, who had been consecrated directly by God. The first bishop of the Church was Jesus Christ himself. He had imparted his divine strength to his disciples: the apostles who, in their turn, had imparted it to each bishop through the Holy Orders\*. That strength especially set the bishops apart from other believers and gave absolution for their sins. It obliged them to lead the believers on the road to salvation, take care that their faith would not weaken, and help them understand the norms of pious life according to God's instructions.

The Christian Church rallied people who, according to ancient beliefs, belonged to different social groups and cults, and did not interact with each other. Poor or rich, Greeks, Romans or Jews, Christians were linked by their love of God and their fellow-men, and they were equally entitled to receive the blessing of salvation. They all had one Bible and the same sacraments which constantly reminded them they were equal before God. The principles of Christian faith gave birth to a new society that had no need of frontiers and armies to maintain its unity. Dispersed throughout the Empire, Christians shared one goal and followed strictly what they

considered the celestial power. Varying in possessions, origin, or intellect, every Christian worked for the salvation of the others according to his abilities. There was nothing that could weaken the conviction that different Christians represented one whole, like different parts of the body. They called the Church "The Body of Christ".

There was nothing formal in the life of the Christians, not even the observance of the cult of the emperor. In the third century that cult had entirely lost its religious character yet it continued to evidence loyalty to the state and respect for the existing order. The government interpreted the Christians' refusal to observe the cult as defying the existing order. That was why the Empire felt uncomfortable with such subjects.

In the middle of the third century, when 10 percent of the Empire's subjects were Christian, friction between the Christian Church and the Empire increased. The Christian Church resembled a state within the state. It had its own laws and its own "people of God", and its territory coincided with that of the Empire because the Church was "ecumenical". Christians called their God "dominus", the emperor's title, and the Church service was called 'militia' like the Empire's city service. The government could no longer remain indifferent to Christians. The Christians' influence in society had grown so much that they either had to be exterminated or officially acknowledged.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. *Why was the Roman political system no longer able to function within the expanded boundaries of the empire?*
2. *What prompted the empire's new strategy towards the barbarians?*
3. *Point out the main consequences for the Empire from the Barbarian infiltration into the Roman army.*
4. *What changes occurred in the administrative and military power under the Dominate?*
5. *Point out the causes for the conflict between the Christian Church and the Roman state.*



## CHAPTER THREE

# 3

### THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

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#### **A** “God is One”: the Christian challenge to the ancient world

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The refusal of Christians to worship the Roman emperor as a deity caused confusion and bewilderment. To the ancient world devoted to peace and order, the Christian saying, “God is One,” sounded challenging. However, if to most subjects of the Empire those words defied the status quo, to Christians they exactly described their whole life.

Christians lived in constant and ardent expectation of a miracle. God himself had promised to save them, to grant absolution from their sins and accept them in the kingdom of God. In other words, he had promised them immortality. That gift justified all their efforts to deserve it by leading a pious life. Moreover, the first Christians were convinced that there was little time left until the promised miracle came true – less than one’s lifetime.

That is why they hastily prepared for salvation. They could hardly wait between each holy communion and keenly attended church meetings. Instead of majestic temples, Christians had the Church, an assembly of believers in the name of faith and love. It was not important where the “supper of love” was to be held, provided Christians could take the Eucharist and relive once again the miracles of the Saviour (Doc. 1).

The most important person among the Christians was the bishop. Christians consulted him about everything, religious matters as well as everyday problems. Christians believed God was everywhere and could see everything they did. For this reason Christians behaved the same way in church as in daily life. Instructions for pious life were literally observed. Often, before the eyes of their amazed contemporaries, Christians gave out all they possessed to the poor as a token of love for their kinsmen; they dressed up in white as a sign of spiritual purity, and ardently converted pagans to Christianity to help them save themselves. Christians were not interested in daily routine matters. With their eyes turned to the sky, exerting all their strength to deserve immortality, they were strangers on earth. Their dreamt of heaven and eternal life.

#### **B** Philosophy or Religion

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From the beginning of the second century, the ability of the Christian Church to unite diverse peoples created a serious problem. At that time the Christian “people of God” had become as diverse as the ancient world itself. The Church included many Greeks, Syrians, and Romans, who brought with them the peculiarities of their own ethnic temperaments and cultural traditions. They were all equally excited by the legends about the life and miracles of



Christ. Nevertheless, “new” Christians’ stories about the deeds of the Son of God were so strongly influenced by local colour that a true image of the Saviour was at times barely recognizable.

The strongest evidence of such a peculiar image of God came from the Gnostics. They were learned people, highly knowledgeable in philosophy. The principles of Christian teaching opened for them endless philosophical problems. Gnostics studied the acts and life of Christ by the rules of ancient science and concluded that God was some kind of “Superior knowledge” (“gnosis” in Greek). The God from Gnostic books, who commanded all knowledge, was accessible only to a few elected people who professed science. He bore little resemblance to the Christ that was accessible to all believers as described in Christian preaching.

Although there was no ill intention in the studies of the Gnostics, only a most genuine interest, their work contradicted the principles of Christian teaching. According to the Gnostics, unconditional faith in God could be replaced by “love for knowledge” (philosophy). The Christian Church estimated such teaching as a threat to the unity of faith and condemned gnosticism as heresy \*.

## **C** Unity of faith: “The New Testament”

Gnostics represented only one of the heresies known to the early Church. Each heretical teaching left behind a multitude of books. All of them described one and the same story – the life of Christ – but in the same time, they reflected the environment in which they had been written. The availability of so many images of Christ threatened to destroy the belief that Christ was unique. In response to that threat, the Church decided to record the true stories about the life of Christ, which until then had been passed on orally from

each bishop to his successor. The unity of the Christian Church was once again manifested by its collecting the existing legends about Christ’s life in one holy book. By the middle of the second century, the first variant of the New Testament was created. It included the Acts and the Epistles of the Apostles, the Revelation, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

To protect the people of God from heresy, Christian rituals and service began to get standardized. No matter in what part of the Empire they lived, Christians gathered for the eucharist on one and the same day: Sunday. Gradually, in all local churches they started to read the Old and the New Testament during divine service. They celebrated the same festivals: Easter\*, the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ, Pentecost (the establishment of the Christian Church), and the holidays of Christian martyrs.

## **D** Persecutions and martyrdom

In the first centuries after the birth of the Christian Church (1st to 3rd centuries), no Christian could feel safe within the Roman Empire. Persecutions of Christians were either individual – i.e., trials against individual Christian preachers – or mass persecutions of Christians over whole provinces. In the first century, when Christians were still few in number, the government persecuted them along with the Jews during different disturbances and rebellions in the Empire. One hundred years later, they were more frequently brought to trial for non-observance of the cult of the emperor. In the middle of the third century, the Christian problem became a critical problem for the Empire and under Decius (249-251) persecution of Christians became a consistent state policy. Laws were issued banning Christianity and huge efforts were made to control com-



pliance. In 303, with a special “universal law,” Diocletian ordered the greatest persecution of Christians up to that time. Those that were particularly unbending, who would under no circumstances leave the faith, were punished with death. The life of the early Church was marked by the blood of the Christian martyrs.

There is a curious regularity in the developing conflict between the Christian Church and the Roman Empire. The more Christians were persecuted, the more people joined the Church. Many of them, shaken by the example of the Christian martyrs, converted to the faith. Hero-martyrs believed they would be resurrected after death like Christ, and would find eternal life. It was believed

that a ‘martyr-death’ could bring a man more quickly to immortality, and despite extreme suffering, death seemed the desired rapid deliverance from the burdens of imperfect earthly life.

The Christian Church referred to the example of the martyrs as evidence of resurrection and victory over death. It meticulously described the life of the martyrs in special texts and proclaimed many of the martyrs saints. The saints' lives would become the Christians' favourite instructive reading for centuries. Their aim was to show the great power of faith over death. It was not accidental that a martyr was commemorated on the date of his death, as that date was believed to be the beginning of the martyr's true eternal life.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. *How do Christians differ from the other subjects of the Roman Empire?*
2. *Do the Gnostics' ideas contradict the significance of Christianity? Give arguments.*
3. *How was unity of faith manifested in the 2nd-3rd centuries?*
4. *How did the Church use the example of Christian martyrs in favour of the faith?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **Origen and the Alexandrian School**

The first half of the third century was a time of great changes in the ancient world. To Christianity it was an important period because of the work of the father of religious science, Origen (185-254). He developed the first comprehensive ordered version of Christian mythology which was the basis of Christian ideas about science.

Origen's life was that of a model Christian. He was born in a Greek Christian family in Alexandria and acquired knowledge of Christianity in his childhood. As an adolescent, Origen had been fascinated by the idea of dying a Christian martyr, but he became a teacher in Alexandria instead. In 203, barely 20 years of age, Origen started teaching to provide for his family.

He spent many long years studying Hebrew, which he needed to study the holy books. His contemporaries were impressed by his capacity for work. In their writings they mention 2000 works by Origen, the larger part of which have been lost. Origen's “Rules” for example, a collection of about 50 volumes, contained all the then known Hebrew biblical texts in the original, with translations into Greek and Latin, including notes and comments.

Origen's works are marked by the spirit of Alexandria, a crossroads of cultures in which an atmosphere of tolerance for diversity reigned. Alexandria was also one of the prime scientific centres of the ancient world.



That explains why Origen's works combined Christian faith and classical scientific methodology. Origen managed to show that many of the things ancient scientists knew such as taxonomy, logic, knowledge of symbols, could be useful for collecting, arranging, and interpreting Christian holy texts.

During one of the persecutions of Christians in 252, Origen was caught and tortured. He died of his wounds shortly afterwards. Thus at an old age, the dream of his early youth was realized, since he died a martyr. Origen left Christians a very important idea, that in "heathen" science there were things that could be useful to Christianity. A letter to one of his students has been preserved and it reads, "I wish you would use all the efforts of your mind in favour of Christianity.

That should be your supreme goal. In order to achieve that, I want you to take from Greek philosophy all the knowledge that could be introduced into Christianity as well as the details from geometry and astronomy that could serve to explain the holy books so that what philosophers say about geometry, music, grammar, rhetoric, astronomy, namely that these are complementing philosophy, could be said about philosophy itself with regard to Christianity".

Origen left the Christian world an important scientific centre in Alexandria. His work of decades had given invaluable harvest: his disciples zealously continued the work he had begun and one of the most famous Christian schools was established, the Alexandrian School.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# 4

### **"IN THIS SIGN THOU WILT CONQUER": THE CENTURY OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT (4TH CENTURY)**

#### **A Emperor Constantine the Great: the history of a sign**

In the beginning of the 4th century, the war Diocletian had declared on the Christian Church threatened to become a war against the majority of the Empire's subjects. The obvious absurdity of the situation called for another solution to the problem. So there came a

man who risked recognizing Christianity as an ally, and not an enemy to the Empire, thus uniquely influencing the fourth century. That man was Roman emperor Constantine the Great (306-337).

As Eusebius, one of Constantine's biographers, wrote, the future emperor was brought up in an atmosphere of strict piety. In the regions ruled by his father, Constantius Chlorus, Diocletian's decrees for persecuting Christians had not been applied. The respect for the different reli-



gious beliefs left a profound imprint on Constantine's rule. It helped him make the difficult choice of reuniting the Empire on the basis of Christianity.

After his father's death, Constantine received the support of the army and became one of the pretenders to the throne. The Empire at that time was torn by contradictions and the dynastic ambitions of Diocletian's successors. Often those contradictions were caused by the individual rulers' different attitudes to Christians. Constantine's most serious rival for the throne was Maxentius in Rome. In 312, Constantine, at the head of a small army, set off for Rome through the Alps to solve his conflict with Maxentius.

The forthcoming battle meant to Constantine a lot more than common military victory. Challenging Rome signified a dramatic break with tradition. The outcome of such a sacrilegious act could only be either absolute victory or death. It was no wonder then that at that critical moment, Constantine anxiously sought spiritual support for his decision. It is said that on the eve of the decisive battle, the emperor received a sign. He saw a luminous cross in the sky with the words "In this sign thou wilt conquer" (*In hoc signo vinces*). On the next day, before the battle, he ordered his soldiers to put on their shields a Christian cross. His army won the battle and soon all the western provinces of the Roman Empire were united under the rule of Constantine. There is no doubt he converted to Christianity then.

## **B** The Edict of Milan – Constantine and the Church

In 313, when he defeated Maxentius, Constantine won another triumphant victory without shedding blood. He issued the so-called Milan Edict of Toleration, giving

complete freedom to all religions in the Empire. The edict put an end to persecutions of Christians and returned Church property confiscated during persecutions. The aim of the Milan Edict was to overcome the tension that tore the Empire and strengthen its unity. At the beginning of the 4th century, the only way to achieve that was to give equality to all religious cults.

## **C** The "Nicene formula": the empire and its unity

In the 320s, the unity and peace Constantine pursued so ardently through the Milan Edict were severely threatened. The reason was the division of the large Christian community by a theological controversy. Advocates of the different parties argued constantly and passionately and occasionally their disagreements grew into disturbances. People of different social layers took part in them. The problem which prompted such enormous public response was related to some subtle issues of Christian teaching. Arius, a priest in the church of Alexandria, taught that the Son did not share the divinity of the Father. The conflict between Arius' followers and his opponents was so violent that blood was shed.

In order to put an end to the controversy, Constantine the Great called in 325 the first ecumenical council of all bishops, the Council of Nicaea. The Council repudiated the Arian heresy. But in order to safeguard Christians from similar heretical delusions in the future, the Council adopted a key document. It formulated the Nicæan Creed, or the "Nicene formula", the truest, most concise description of Christian principles. The Council decreed that the Nicene creed was compulsory for all Christians, and those who did not accept it would be declared apostates and treated as pagans.



The Nicaean Council became the first of a long series of ecumenical councils\* that built up the basis of Christian doctrine\* as we know it today. By adopting the Nicaean Creed, the Church made a big step towards unification. Activities of all Christian church communities were standardized.

The Nicaean Council had an important impact on the Empire, too. It allowed Constantine the Great to understand that since Christianity was already playing such an important role in the life of the Empire, maintaining the unity of Christian faith meant maintaining the empire's unity. Constantine the Great supported firmly the Nicene Creed. Consequently, care for religious unity became imperial policy.

## **D** Symbol of Revival: Constantinople

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The Empire's achievements in the 4th century needed to be given exterior expression. Constantine the Great established a new capital. The revived Empire needed a new Rome unsullied by pagan traditions. The emperor chose Byzantium, the site of an old Greek colony in the eastern part of the Balkans. Later historians would call it the eastern part of the Empire.

The geographical location of the city, surrounded on three sides by sea and a naturally protected seaport in the Golden Horn bay, made it practically inaccessible. Laying between the two parts of the Empire, in the beginning of the 4th century Byzantium symbolized well the spirit of revival, the ambition to renew the Empire's unity. Christianity played a leading role in that process. The legend goes that Virgin Mary herself had guided his hand when Constantine defined the boundaries of the new city.

The emperor granted the new capital all the rights and privileges of old Rome. Intense building activities began; stone and bricks, marble and gold were

used to prove the justice of Constantine's cause. The ultimate result of his efforts was breathtaking. In 330 Constantinople was officially declared capital. Its buildings were even more brilliant and impressive than those of old Rome. The emperor moved all the government officials with their families to the new capital. No subject was to have any doubts that the administrative traditions of the Empire had been affected by the radical change.

For the past sixteen centuries, thousands of pages have been written describing the magnificence of the new capital. Yet it is hard to describe the importance and beauty of that city. For that reason it had many names: it was officially called New Rome, but its citizens called it Constantinople, the city of Constantine.

## **E** Fighting paganism: Julian the Apostate

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To try and achieve religious unity in the Empire, Constantine's successors undertook measures to restrict pagan cults and their influence. Some pagan temples were closed down and the worship of idols was banned. In the spiritual life of the Roman Empire, however, paganism still held a much more important place than the cults of pagan deities themselves. In the middle of the 4th century, culture, education, and science, which the Empire had been promoting throughout its history, were still a pagan monopoly.

Under emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363), an attempt was made to restore paganism. A nephew of Constantine the Great's, Julian was brought up as a Christian like all of Constantine's children. But unlike them, he showed a special interest in classical philosophy which was naturally related to the old gods. For a long time Julian skillfully managed to live a double life. His closest relatives and friends were



aware he was pagan but to everybody else he appeared to be a good Christian, deeply interested in science. A talented military commander, he was loved by his soldiers. Upon attaining the throne in 361, he suddenly proclaimed himself a pagan, then broke with Christianity and deprived it of its privileges by a special law.

In Julian, paganism found a formidable opponent of Constantine the Great's work. Julian strongly believed in and made a great effort to revive the worship of the old gods by all possible means. He set himself to achieve his great dream of reforming ancient religious beliefs. Julian wanted to unite all ancient cults into one system. In its center was to be the cult of the sun, and a special law declared that all pagan deities were the different manifestations of the sun-god. The structure and discipline of Julian's religious organization had been copied from the Christian church he knew so well.

Julian made an all-out effort to curb the influence of Christianity, isolating it from the Empire's public life. He deprived the Church of its privileges and expelled Christian officials from the imperial palace. He even made plans to organize a vigorous campaign against the Christians. His intentions however, were never realized.

Only two years after coming to the throne, Julian was killed in a valiant attack on the Persians in the east. The legend says that at his death-bed he cried to Christ, "Galilean, you have conquered!" ('Vicisti, Galilae'). By an irony of fate, the staunch defender of paganism was buried in Tarsus, the birth town of the Apostle Paul, the fervent propagator of Christianity among pagans. Whether the legend is true or not, and whether Julian's last words were truly those, is not important. The fact is, that from the mid-4th century, Christianity would be without rival in its fight over people's souls.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. *What was Constantine's road to power?*
2. *Point out the reasons that caused the issuing of the Milan Edict in 313 and describe the conditions of Christianity in the Empire after the edict.*
3. *Why was Constantine the first among Roman emperors to care about unity of religion?*
4. *What were the advantages of Constantinople, the new capital of the empire?*
5. *Was it possible for pagan religion to be restored under Julian the Apostate?*  
(Justify your answers).

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **Eusebius of Caesarea – the life of a 4th century thinker**

Eusebius was Syrian. His homeland, Palestine, linked him to the roots of Christianity, while his education in Antioch linked him with ancient culture. Fluent in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, he was a representative of Origen's generation of

Christians who felt comfortable in the Hellenistic world. Having risen above the idea that ancient culture should be rejected for its pagan nature, that new generation studied it in detail from a Christian viewpoint.



During Emperor Diocletian’s persecutions, Eusebius was thrown in jail and later sent into exile. While in exile he was often forced to move from one place to another, travelling throughout the whole Christian East: in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. The triumph of Christianity under Constantine completely changed Eusebius’ life. He became closely associated with the imperial palace and soon turned into a man in the emperor’s confidence. Later, as a result of that intimacy, the first Christian biography of Constantine was written and it expressed for the first time the concept of the parallel development of Church and Empire.

Christian religion made Eusebius look for the link between the divine conception in whose name the Church existed, and Constantine’s Empire, obviously blessed by God. His classical education provided him the appropriate research methods. The final result was the emergence of a new literary genre, the so-called “church history.” Eusebius’ History had little in common with the “histories” by Herodotus and Thucydides. While the latter described lands, people,

and events, Eusebius’ work tried to address how the divine idea of saving humanity was expressed in everything ever since the existence of man. From that viewpoint, the history of humanity looked like a path to God and each step along that path reduced the distance between them. The Christian’s linkage between the history of humanity and divine will changed the classical perception of the world. The division was no longer made between Romans and barbarians, but between Christians and non-Christians.

Like most gifted intellectuals, Eusebius was ahead of his time. The fruits of his labour surpassed his intentions. While trying to explain the period when the Empire persecuted Christians, he found out that everything done by all men at all times was part of one common human effort to a common goal. Eusebius discovered that man, who is always standing up on his toes and aspiring for more, is stepping over the shoulders of his predecessors, wherever they had lived and whatever they had achieved. In this way Eusebius discovered one interpretation of history.

**WORKSHOP:**

**The Christian and the Ancient World**

*Task No. 1:* Copy and complete the following table in your workbook. Before answering, assess which of the listed activities was the leading one under each emperor. Put a cross wherever not applicable.

What did the emperor undertake for the:	Diocletian (284-305)	Constantine (306-337)	Julian (361-363)
* consolidation of the empire			
* establishment of unity of religion			

(If in doubt, revise Chapters 2/B, 4/B,D)



On the basis of the completed table, answer the following question: Which one of the emperors listed in the table renovated the empire and shaped it for centuries?

**Task No.2:** Write down in what way Christianity changed the destiny of ancient people and the Roman Empire?

You could use the following plan for your answer:

- the new Christian concept of the world
- differences between the Christian community and ancient society
- organization of Church and state
- Christians and emperors; solution by way of force; renovation and unity through Christian religion

## CHAPTER FIVE

# 5

### ORDER AND CONFUSION: HISTORY OF THE 5TH CENTURY

#### **A** Theodosius the Great and the concept of the Holy Empire

Theodosius the Great (379-395) was one of those remarkable men that usually come forth at the boundary between two epochs. They emerge from history because of their commitment to take risks and defend the changes wrought by time.

He was born in Spain. Until his election as emperor in 379, he had been known only for his military genius. During his journey to Constantinople, where he was to take over, he had fallen ill. His illness must have been quite serious, because his getting over it had appeared to him as a divine miracle.

The first state act of the new emperor was to issue in 380 the “Law on Orthodox Creed”. According to that law, every subject of the Empire had to profess the true (orthodox) practice of the Christian Church. Those who did not were to be regarded as heretics or pagans, and such were considered opponents of Church and Empire, subject to severe punishment under the law. So that there should be no mistaking orthodox practice, the law included the full text of the Nicene formula. For the first time in history, the purity of Christian faith was not the concern of the Church alone, and was settled by an imperial decree.

Created to strengthen the unity of faith, the Law of 380 reflected the blend between Empire and Church and, in practice, it outlined the orthodox empire’s po-



litical doctrine, in which the Empire was a sanctified instrument for bringing all people to the Christian Church; any disobedience to the Church was to be regarded as a crime against God's order on earth. The Law of 380 stood at the beginning of all major collections of laws adopted in medieval ages. It is for that law Theodosius was to be called "the Great".

## **B** East and West

After Theodosius' death in 395, the immense Empire was partitioned between his two sons. Arcadius received the East with Constantinople as capital, and Honorius the West with Rome as capital. Such partitioning used to be customary in the 4th century in order to make the vast territory's administration more efficient. However, along with the administrative difficulties of that time, there were already differences between the Empire's east and west.

As early as the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the eastern provinces already produced almost everything the Empire needed, from wheat to luxurious goods. Active trade relations stimulated production which, in its turn, led to the development of a natural trade environment and flourishing roads and towns. Busy roads ran between Alexandria (in Egypt) and Antioch (in Syria), between Ephesus (in Asia Minor) and Salonika (on the Balkans), all of them linked with "New" Rome, the center of power. Thus, in the beginning of the 5th century, the eastern provinces developed into an apparently independent world within the boundaries of the Roman Empire.

Until the West was able to pay gold for the luxury goods and food produced in the east, the difference between the two parts of the Empire was barely perceptible. Following the crisis in the 3rd century, however, Rome's traditional sources

of funds and riches, the military victories and new provinces, had dried up. Daily concern about survival brought about a profound change in the life of the western provinces. Limited local production could not satisfy the western towns' extensive consumer demands. Citizens most often retired to the countryside where hunger and poverty were less unbearable. A continuing process of desertion of towns began. The roads that used to be the great pride of Roman civilization were abandoned and decayed. In the West, Italy, Gaul, Spain, Brittany and North Africa began to establish themselves as separate regions. At first their efforts were merely to ensure means of subsistence, but later they decided how to govern themselves, so gradually, these regions began to lead an independent existence.

When Constantine the Great transferred the capital to Constantinople, the center of gravity of the whole Roman world moved east. In 395, however, no one accepted the partition of the Empire as irreversible. It was only after the unprecedented Barbarian invasion in the 5th century that it would become clear that the two parts of the powerful Roman Empire faced different destinies.

## **C** Great changes: the Great migration of peoples

Historians call the great mass changes of habitat that lasted throughout the fourth and up to the tenth centuries "the Great migration of peoples". The process reached a peak in the 5th-6th centuries. The Great migration of peoples was due both to the barbarian tribes' rapid demographic growth and the appeal of the Empire's fertile lands. In their search for better living conditions and attracted by the old fame of Rome, the peoples of the north moved slowly southwards and westwards, reaching the Atlantic Ocean. The



Eastern Roman emperors managed to divert attackers from the eastern provinces by buying them off, using eastern wealth and diplomatic maneuvers.

Basically, the Great migration of peoples was an ongoing flight. The barbarians that swept over the Empire were in actual fact refugees, hunted by stronger or more cruel tribes. Usually their flight took the form of war. That was the only means for the Barbarians to force the Empire to give them refuge.

Two major ethnic groups were actually involved in the Great migration of peoples: the Germanic and the Asian nomadic tribes, of which the most important were the Huns.

In the beginning of the 4th century, the Germanic tribes were already firmly settled along the northern frontiers of the Roman Empire, and had established several strong military and political alliances: the Saxons (along the Elbe), the Franks and the Allamanni (along the Rhine), and the Goths (between the Danube and Dnestr). In the middle of the 4th century, pressure from the Huns disintegrated the Gothic tribal alliance. Part of the Goths crossed the Danube and began to settle in the northern part of the Balkan peninsula (Doc. 2). The first blow of the Great migration of peoples was taken up by the eastern Roman provinces. Having no idea of the true dimension of the new Barbarian problem, emperors in Constantinople resorted to the well-known practice of allotting lands in which the Goths could settle as *foederati*. Before long it became clear the lands along the Danube could not accommodate the large numbers of people pouring into the Empire. The emperors were unable to manage the ever growing demands of the new discontented "allies." But the wealth of Constantinople ultimately succeeded in buying off the most warlike and to induce them to look for land and rights elsewhere, turning them west.

The western Roman legions were unable to stop the vigorous Barbarian attacks and in 410, the ancient world was horrified to see the Visigoths, led by Alaric, capture Rome. After that the Visigoths settled permanently in Aquitania (today southwest France). At the same time, the Saxons began attacking Brittany. In the middle of the 5th century they would gradually settle there, driving out the local population. The Franks and Burgundians occupied territories in Gaul, while south Spain would fall to the Vandals. At the beginning of the 5th century, the Barbarians tried hard to consolidate their power in the conquered lands and be acknowledged in Rome. The problem was that the Barbarians did not remain long into one place and kept moving southwards and westwards, fleeing from other Barbarian attackers.

The violent attacks of the Huns caused another major displacement. Their king, Attila (434-453), called the "Scourge of God", remains the most cruel person of his time. About 434 A.D. he dominated the Huns and several other tribes, among them the Bulgars. Attila ruled over the Barbarian world that stretched from the woods of ancient Germany to the central Asian steppes. His enormous nomadic army invaded Europe and a transient but terrifying Hun state was established. Within 4 years Attila would devastate almost all of western Roman Empire. But his army would be defeated at Catalaunian Fields near Orléans (today France) in 451 A.D. This last battle against the Huns covered with glory Aetius, the "last Roman". His army consisted mostly of barbarians: Goths, Franks, Alemanni – an irony of fate. The last defenders of the Empire turned to be the ones the Empire had been constantly fighting.

A good example of ethnic displacements caused by the Great migration of peoples was the short "world tour" of the Vandals. Their journey started with their penetrating Gaul in the beginning of the



5th century. The Goths pushed them south to Spain. When the Goths in their turn fell to the Franks and moved to Spain, the Vandals went to Africa and from Carthage, continued by sea and attacked south Europe. At the time, they were the only Barbarians with a fleet. In 455 A.D. the Vandals sacked Rome and their actions, so ruthlessly destructive, have come to us as 'vandalism'\*

Barbarian victories had been to a great extent facilitated by the lack of co-ordination between "Old" and "New" Rome. Confused by the extent of the Barbarian attacks, the two parts of the Empire had been forced to act separately. Constantinople accepted the Barbarians as subjects and generously gave their leaders titles and gold, making every effort to keep them away from the Mediterranean and the secrets of seafaring. In the west, where ties with the provinces were not so solid, Rome relied on the enmity between the invaders. That, however, turned out not to be enough.

## **D** Strange times

Confusion is the true name of the atmosphere reigning throughout the period of the Great migration of peoples. The geography of the Roman Empire had been disrupted. In the 5th and 6th centuries it was difficult to make out the contour of the Roman provinces because of the numerous Barbarian kingdoms. On the one hand, the Barbarian kings had been flattered by the thought they ruled as Roman officials. On the other hand, the areas they ruled gradually began to be called after the names of the different

tribes: Bretagne (the Britons), now in France; Saxony (the Saxons), now in Germany; Burgundy (the Burgundians), now in France; and Andalusia (the Vandals), now in Spain. The map of Europe is a good memento of those past days.

The confusion in the hearts of the people was even greater. Those strange and troubled times were full of absurd events like the case of Honoria, sister of a western Roman emperor, who sent Attila, the Scourge of God, an engagement ring. Her brother was forced to get her married hurriedly to somebody else before the terrible Hun came to claim his fiancée and half of the Empire as dowry. Obviously, Attila's wickedness did not prevent him from ruling over the lady's imagination.

However, all misunderstandings did not end so harmlessly as Honoria's engagement. For instance, when the men of an Italian town returned after 6 years of captivity with Attila, nobody had been expecting them to be alive. Their wives had remarried. Incapable of solving the problem, the local bishop turned to Pope Leo the Great (440-461) for advice. The answer he got was as confusing as the times that created such a situation. The pope was categorical that the wives were not liable to punishment for having remarried. But if they refused to get back to their former husbands, they were to be excommunicated.

The fifth century was a period of merging. From that chaos of ever moving people, traditions, circumstances and laws, the new world of the medieval civilization was later born. East and West were to step into it disunited and different but having preserved their common link: the Christian faith.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. What were the consequences of the 380 Law of Theodosius for the Church and the State?
2. What were the differences between the eastern and western provinces of the Empire?



3. *What caused the Great migration of peoples and what were the main features of that historical phenomenon?*

4. *Was there any difference in the policies of the eastern and western provinces of the Empire towards the Barbarian invaders?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **Augustine the Blessed, or how to use Antiquity**

Augustine, known also as the "Blessed," is one of the most typical examples of cultural duality in the 4th century. A Roman from Africa, he had survived the fall of Roman civilization under the Barbarian attacks without ceasing to be its faithful admirer. During the Church's golden 5th century, he became one of the Fathers of the Christian Church, teaching the most important thing: how to interpret the beauty of ancient culture in Christian terms.

He was born in 354 A.D. in North Africa of a Christian mother and a pagan father. Sponsored by a rich relative, he completed the traditional course of free ancient education. There had been no sign that the light-hearted adolescent, compelled to support himself as a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage, would turn into a devout Christian. He lived in a world of intellectual fashion, trying to find an answer to the philosophical problem of "good and evil" conflict; at times he had been carried away by Manichaeism\*, Platonism\*, Skepticism\*. His wanderings in the world of ideas paralleled his travels in the real world. After Carthage, he taught in Rome and Milan. One day when he was 32, he heard a voice telling him, "Read the Scriptures", and he converted to Christianity. Soon after that he sold his inheritance and with a small circle of friends, began to live an almost secluded life in the North African town of Hippo.

His erudition must have been impressive because the local bishop, who did not speak Latin, took him as his assistant. In 396 Augustine succeeded to the bishopric and remained in Hippo until his death. His *De Civitate Dei*, *Confessions*, and most of his works were written there. It was also there that he came to believe everything was useful insofar as it consolidated or confirmed Christian doctrine. In man's search for God, anything could be of assistance: the ancient system of education, the methods of ancient rhetoric and philosophy, as well as ancient literature and art. Antiquity had to be used by Christianity just as Jews had dedicated to their God the golden dishes they had carried off by force from the Egyptians.

Augustine lived up to the then unheard of age of 76. In 430, as Hippo was besieged by the Vandals, Rome sent a small federal army of Goths. Concerned about the Goth-Arians and seeking to dispel any heretical fallacies, Augustine invited their bishop to a public debate. In the besieged town, Augustine and the Goths' bishop debated for hours on end in accordance with the laws of ancient rhetoric. To a great extent that debate marked the end of an era. No one triumphed. Their decision to continue the debate in writing remained unrealized as Augustine died during the siege. History should be grateful that the Vandals spared Augustine's library and grave.





## THE CONQUERED GODS: FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION (4TH-5TH CENTURIES)

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### **A** “Everyone is allowed in Church”

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Following the Law of 380 of Theodosius, Christian faith grew into a prerequisite for becoming an imperial subject. Conversion to Christianity was no longer a matter of personal choice. For the first time in Church history, people had to profess the faith as a duty. Therefore, the Church was seriously concerned that Christian rules of conduct might be observed only formally. Though the emperor could relax and contemplate how his subjects submitted to his power, God anxiously observed those who shammed belief and who, incapable of genuine conversion, were as far from salvation as the pagans. Those people were the Church’s greatest concern in the 4th and the 5th centuries.

The establishment of Christianity as the official state religion made it part of everyday life. But in order to reach the hearts and minds of the ancient people, Christianity had to force its way through local perceptions and prejudices, the old cult practices and traditions. The Church succeeded largely because of the Christian belief that God was everywhere. The Christian cult gradually adjusted itself so that the numerous, dissimilar believers became aware of God’s blessing in everything that surrounded them, even in things they had known before conversion.

The most marked example of such adjustment was the Christian temple. Christian faith did not require a special place for worship so the Early Church used to hold its meetings wherever it found it suitable. But already in the 3rd century, as the Church was growing, it felt the necessity of having its own special building designed for larger public forms of worship for the increasing numbers of Christians. The first churches were built as basilicas, the most widespread type of public building in the ancient world. There used to be a basilica in every town and it usually housed the city exchange, commercial offices, and the market; places where multitudes gathered.

Gathered inside God’s house, the believers listened to the sermon and tried to understand it. But in the stillness of the church building, the bishops’ long and monotonous lecturing could hardly hold the congregation’s attention all the time and often, during the service, people would discuss horse races or market prices. To make divine service simpler and more exciting, the Church began to use ancient art methods. Paintings were hung on the walls, depicting scenes from Jesus’ life and images of saints – icons. Some techniques of the ancient theatre and music were introduced. Put into a more dramatic form with a specific décor, the church sermon thus reached



worshippers' hearts and minds more easily. What is more, the worshippers began to go to church not only on Sundays, but every day and on the most important old feast days. The Christian calendar included the annual commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ (Christmas) and many feast days of saints, some of them coinciding with big agricultural festivals.

On the other hand, the performance of worship and the ever growing Church required changes in Church organization. The number of priests was increased and their duties became a profession. Devoted uniquely to Church affairs, the clergy set apart from worldly matters. The Church communities' organization followed the state's and a similar ecclesiastic administrative hierarchy developed. From the very beginning, all local churches already had their own bishops. In the 5th-6th centuries, control over the diocese in a province began to be assumed by a metropolitan. Five principal sees were outlined – those of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople – with patriarchs as the highest-ranking bishops.

## **B** Power of the Church

In the fourth and fifth centuries, Roman cities still lived the full-blooded classical life of the past. The authorities continued to maintain the public buildings in good condition. However, there were certain important changes. Imperial officials were rarely seen at the forum. They ruled the city from their countryside villas and stayed away from the traditional centre of city public life; thus leadership mingled less with other citizens.

The church building became the most appropriate place for social intercourse. Sunday liturgies gathered men and women of all social strata. Rulers and craftsmen alike were subjected to God's scrutiny. From the pulpit, the bishop's

searching look would expose any committed sin or social injustice. The wealthy vividly contrasted with the poor and the colourful crowd of invalids, vagabonds, and orphans begging at the church gates.

The bishop would moralize, "Help the poor and the needy!" His words were intended to arouse compassion and charitable donations to the poor and the needy. The bishop would urge everybody to give alms because everyone tended to commit sin. Therefore even the most modest donation would help deliverance from sin. The rich gave the most.

Thus in the beginning of the fifth century, a new figure dominated the city, the bishop. His status was based on his role of defender of the humiliated and the wronged, the poor and the castoffs. The most influential bishops recorded in history are Ambrose, bishop of Milan; Augustine, bishop of Hippo; Pope Leo in Rome; Saint John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople; and Theophilus of Alexandria.

## **C** Saint John Chrysostom or the sense of Christian rhetoric

John (345?-407 A.D.) was born of a noble wealthy family in Antioch, the capital of Syria. His love of learning took him to Levanus' prestigious private school of rhetoric at an early age. According to a legend, before his death the famous orator, Levanus, had designated young John as his successor in teaching rhetoric. But John refused to accept this sure way to wealth, respect, and a stable political career, devoting himself instead to the Christian cause. He became a priest in the central city church. While preaching, he used his perfect rhetorical skills, adding such zeal that on Sundays, during his sermons, "the streets and pubs in Antioch became deserted". Very soon John was noticed and



in 398 he was solemnly ordained as patriarch of Constantinople.

In his concern to make people live a righteous life, he was confronted by a world that had officially adopted Christianity but remained close to paganism. Even though people flocked to church, outside the church walls there reigned loose morals, hatred, and injustice. Patriarch John tried to eradicate immorality and wickedness. Christ's teachings enlightened both his words and actions. Although physically weak and worn by disease, he practiced the self-denial and austerity required of Christians.

He built homes for the poor out of his own money and condemned vehemently the rich and those in authority for their complacent and unconcerned life. He even criticized the imperial palace's loose morals. According to John, Christianity had to breathe new life into everything: the family, society, and the understanding of faith. His powerful and effective language and way of life had made him the general favourite of the capital city. When in 404 A.D. he was sent into exile upon a false charge, the city rose in revolt.

In 407 A.D., the dethroned patriarch died in Armenia. A few years after his death, John's judges were cursed and he was canonized. He was the most loved and venerated Byzantine saint, and after his death he was called Chrysostom.

John Chrysostom's sermons have become the stuff of legend. Rarely has Christian church witnessed a more perfect manifestation of the ancient art of public speech. The story of John Chrysostom unequivocally confirms the unlimited possibilities of using rhetoric for conversion. Through his sermons, rhetoric was turned from an occupation of a selected few into a means for popularizing Christian faith.

In 399 A.D. the almighty consul, Euthropius, fell from power. Fearing for his life, he sought support from the very patriarch he had openly accused just a few months earlier. On that occasion John

Chrysostom wrote one of his masterpieces, the "Sermon about Evtropi." This is a sermon for all times. "We always can," reads the sermon, "but it is now in particular, the time to cry out 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' Where is the consul's bright dress now? Where are the praises, feasts and celebrations? Where are the wreaths and decorations? ... All this is now gone. The wind has blown away the leaves and the tree is now standing bare and shaken... Where are you now false friends? ... Where is the swarm of parasites? Where is the ever full glass of thick wine? All that is nothing but a dream. Dawn has come and the dream has vanished... It was nothing but a shadow that has run away... It was a web that has come apart... So that is why we shall never get weary of repeating 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!'"

## **D** Rigid Christianity: monasticism

To some Christians, the changes resulting from the Church's adaptation to everyday requirements were unacceptable and even threatening. As in any great religion, there was a limited group of people who would accept nothing but the shortest way to God. The farther the Christian stood from everyday problems, the closer he supposedly was to God. For that reason they believed the Church was deeply wrong in introducing in church service and organization elements of worldly life. Such was their disapproval of the Church that they completely rejected the need of it and often retired to remote secluded places.

Anthony the Great was one of the early Christian hermits who was later to become so important to Christianity. He was born in the middle of the third century in Egypt in a rich rural family. At an early age, deeply inspired by Christian doctrine, he gave away all his property and retired to the desert where he



spent twenty years completely isolated in an empty tomb. His example attracted many followers. He became their teacher and guide. Later, in their striving after salvation, hermits returned to their Christian vocation, i.e. the struggle to save their fellow men, and they formed a monastic society. From complete rejection of the world, monastic life turned into zealous service for its salvation. That was why Anthony the Great is regarded as the founder of Christian monasticism, although there had been hermits long before him.

There were followers of the strict monastic ideal throughout the Christian world, in Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor, and Europe. Monks began living in monasteries, their community led by a Father Superior (abbot), isolated from secular society and bound by religious vows. One of Anthony's followers, Pachomius the Great, made the final organization of monastic society by working out its first statute. All subsequent statutes known to us have been devised after the pattern of the first one. The statute regulated the monk's daily life to the minutest detail. It required from the brethren military discipline and fervent devotion to faith just like the first Christians.

Monasteries began to emerge in towns, too. In Constantinople alone, there were more than 50. In the West, where most towns had been devastated,

monasteries were built in naturally protected areas easily defensible from barbarian invasions. True to the ascetic ideal, monks used to manufacture everything necessary for their existence. Along with that, like the churches in the towns and villages, they took care to strengthen the faith. Scriptoriums\*, libraries, and schools, often even hospitals, orphanages, and inns, were opened in the monasteries. Those activities turned the monasteries into an influential cultural power. That was typical in the West where, for a long time, monks were the only preservers of what remained of ancient culture and the only mentors of the righteous life for newly converted Barbarians.

Eventually, monasticism would be considered as superior church service. However, before the practice of electing bishops only among monks, accounts describing hermits' lives became favourite reading throughout the medieval world. At the time when interaction between East and West was lessening, Christians' faith would be inspired by such writings and life models. Pilgrims from all over the Christian world would gather during journeys to sacred places. In this way the spiritual links in the disunited medieval world would be kept alive even after administrative and trade relations had long ceased to exist.

### **CHECK-UP:**

- 1. Did the use of pagan tradition contradict the essence of Christianity?*
- 2. What forms did Christianity use to adjust to existing realities?*
- 3. How did monasticism come into being?*
- 4. Compare the images of a Christian martyr and a monk.*



## CHAPTER SEVEN



### HORIZONS OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION (4TH AND 5TH CENTURIES)

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#### **A** Christianity and the ancient town

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The ancient world is a world of urban culture. It was in the town that antiquity's political system and culture were born. For centuries people of different birth, origin, social background and wealth lived together in the ancient town without any close contacts. When Christianity spread among those people they accepted its principles and sacred writings in their own way. The educated elite were impressed by the complexity of the Holy Scriptures. Its mysteries used to be the subject of intellectuals' endless comments and interpretations, while common people were impressed by the priest's sermon about Christ's miracles and imminent salvation from this imperfect earthly life.

On the other hand, the nature of the Christian Church required close contacts between believers. It did not allow the ancient town's different social groups to live separately and independently from one another. In the name of salvation the elite and the commoner were forced to communicate with one another. The commoner acquired from the intellectual the possibility of looking beyond the confines of daily life, while the intellectual took from the commoner his sincere belief and ability to hope – qualities inherent to the poor. In this way, the elite and

the common people would become closely connected in one single community: the society of believers.

The activities of that society were managed by the bishop. The cultured Christian bishop did not differ in origin or education from the elite of the ancient world. But his behaviour was entirely subordinated to the needs of the faith. The bishop, being an intellectual with a classical upbringing and education, might grow bored to death by discussions about God with the ignorant baker or the bath attendant. Nevertheless he did so because his vocation as a bishop enjoined him to care for their salvation.

The foundations of Christian theology\* were laid as a result of the work of such people. The Cappadocian circle was a typical example. Basil the Great, Gregory the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa, the most renowned theologians of the 4th century, are known by that name. They were all well educated people, attracted by philosophy and rhetoric. They all came from rich families in Cappadocia (in Asia Minor), and before devoting themselves to the clergy, they had been no different from others of their class. Basil the Great converted to Christianity at the age of 25, while his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, had led a turbulent life and had even been married. They went to Athens University together with the future emperor, Julian the Apostate. The same culture and knowledge that inspired Julian to reform



paganism, inspired the intellectuals from the Cappadocian circle to combine the language of antiquity with Christ's teaching. Such a synthesis was within the power of great minds only, and it lay in the foundations of the Greek speaking eastern Christian theology.

## **B** The world as a school: popular education

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The truths of faith are rather abstract. The man from the street who came into the church could hardly understand everything the priest said about God's order on Earth. In order to reach every believer's mind and heart, the sermon had to be not only instructive and interesting, and adhere to specific rules, but be accessible as well. Making a sermon posed a number of theological and worldly problems. The priest had to find a way to explain the rules of righteous life and at the same time, prevent any distraction during the sermon. He also had to help the congregation memorize his words, since books were a luxury and few people could afford a proper education. That is why authors of sermons had to resort to plots derived from nature whose laws were obvious to everyone. After all, why couldn't nature explain morality since its laws and the laws of people were both divinely governed? Thus the everyday world was added as part of the sermon used to teach morality.

A most typical example of the Christian sermon adjusting to the congregation was the appearance of the "hexads". The first "hexad" was written by Basil the Great himself. It represented a short narrative about the Creation: about the six days described at the beginning of the Old Testament. Taking into account the naive but inquisitive listeners' capacity for understanding, Basil filled his story with amusing details about animals. Half realistic and half fantastic, the stories were served as ex-

amples for moral excellence and denounced wicked habits and actions.

For a long time the hexads would remain the only source of knowledge for medieval man. To many historians that was evidence of the decline of the brilliant ancient culture of Aristotle and Plato. Such historians actually showed they were not aware of the purpose of the hexads. The hexad was not meant to describe an event in terms of factual truth but for the moral lesson to be drawn from it. It was meant to show that everything in the world had moral relevance. The hexads achieved their purpose and eventually influenced the faith of many who might otherwise not have learned about ancient models of science.

## **C** Christianity and the countryside

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As Christianity spread in the countryside it brought along a specific difficulty. Ancient culture had apparently forgotten about the existence of the countryside. Therefore, awakening religious creativity in rural areas gave birth to the so-called hidden books (the Apocrypha). Those would be written and circulated until the very end of the Middle Ages. They usually told about facts of the life of Jesus Christ that had not been included in the sacred books. They were often called "Gospels." The apocryphal "Thomas' Gospel," for example, told legends about Jesus the child, who had been a powerful, bizarre and ineffective wonder-worker, and who killed with one word the children of his age who quarrelled with him. It is not difficult to perceive in that narrative the author's rude background. Most of the apocryphal writings were created by people from the lower strata of society and showed their ideas about the world. That is why they enjoyed great popularity



among the common people. The Apocrypha may deviate from accepted teaching about Christ's life but they showed the craving for reading and writing of those who until then had remained outside of the world of literacy.

The urge of Christianity to make all people aware of its faith gave rise to an intense desire for creativity in a whole world until then neglected by ancient urban culture. That process was most impressive in the eastern provinces of the empire (Egypt, Syria, Armenia). The thousand-year old traditions of Copts (the ancient Egyptians), Syrians, and Armenians thrived in the bosom of the Christian Church. These ancient peoples had long wanted to express themselves in writing. Finally, the coming of Christianity helped create their writing systems. The Syrian and the Copt alphabets were created for the needs of Christian sermons as early as the 2nd and the 3rd centuries. Two centuries later, historical and philosophical works, theological treatises, poetry, and other literature had already been composed in those new writing systems. The most well-known authors of such literature were monks. Ephraim of Syria, the master of religious poetry, was a monk. The famous Copt, Shenute, also was a monk: he was the Father Superior of the legendary White Monastery in Egypt. Apart from fervent devotion to faith, behind the exceptional Syrian and Coptic literary activity one could also perceive their desire to become independent from the Greek cultural environment. It revealed the Eastern estrangement from a culture that had been imposed by force, by the successors of Alexander the Great, the king of Macedon.

Very soon the cultural diversity of the oriental world, charged with the energy of Christian faith, was to confront the Empire with a serious problem.

## **D** The big eastern heresies: provinces versus empire

During the 4th and the 5th centuries life in the eastern provinces of the Empire was influenced by important Christian heresies. In the mid-fifth century there were a particularly large number of Nestorians and Monophysites. Nestorians stressed the human rather than divine nature of Christ while Monophysites rejected human nature in the person of Christ. In 451 the 4th Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon was convened to solve the dogmatic conflict. The teaching of the dual nature of Christ, i.e. the existence of two distinct natures, one wholly divine and the other, wholly human, was declared binding. Nestorians and Monophysites were condemned as heretics and excommunicated (Doc. 5). A century after the formulation of the Nicene Creed, another formal summary of Christian beliefs was promulgated. In that same year, 451, the Huns' incursions in southern Europe were brought to an end after the battle of Catalaunian Fields. To many, these simultaneous victories of Christianity had not been accidental. Unfortunately, the rejoicing was short-lived as turbulences in the eastern provinces cast a shadow over the Christian world.

In order to carry into effect the Council of Chalcedon's resolution to excommunicate the heretics from the Church, Emperor Marcian (450-457) sent troops to Egypt where the Monophysites were the most numerous. The emperor's army drove the heretical bishops away from churches, the most unyielding being subjected to cruel persecution. However, things turned out opposite to what the emperor had initially contemplated. The persecuted bishops became hero martyrs and their followers reached unheard of proportions. Why?

Actually, there was something else behind the religious conflict of that period. If the controversy had remained purely



theological, it could have been solved by the Church. The intervention of the emperor had intensified the already long existing tension between central power in Constantinople and the provinces. The Egyptians considered the new bishops, who were guarded by the emperor's soldiers, as agents of the emperor and blasphemers. Therefore, they ceased to consider the Orthodox Church as a "house of the soul". So they followed the banished bishops, and then Monophysitism spread massively in Syria, Egypt, and Armenia. Because of the

emperors' intervention, the man from the East not only became alienated from power in Constantinople, but also from the Church sustained by the same power. Time would never completely remove the traces of that conflict. It is enough to mention that Armenians and Copts have been Monophysites to this day.

The East confronted Constantinople with its power in diversity, which actually started the process of breaking up the eastern provinces. The Empire had to seek new methods to achieve unity.

### **CHECK-UP:**

- 1. What were the differences between the ancient and the Christian societies?*
- 2. How did Christian intellectuals make the sermon accessible to the assorted congregation?*
- 3. What was the reason for the cultural duality of the community in the eastern provinces and how was it manifested?*
- 4. What was the nature of the conflict between emperors and subjects in the eastern provinces?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The story of a name**

The Roman Empire existed at the end of antiquity. It had gathered together into one political entity the thousand-year old efforts of older Mediterranean civilizations as early as ancient Egypt. In terms of space, the boundaries of the Empire corresponded to the boundaries of the cultured humanity according to the conceptions of that time. Rome considered itself on equal value to the whole world.

The magic that surrounded Rome's name determined its destiny even when its glamour was gone. The burning of Rome by the Goths in 410 startled the ancient world not because it had not witnessed other fires, but because the "universe was turning upside down" as a contemporary from Palestine wrote on

that occasion. As the fifth century went on, Barbarian attacks on Rome became daily routine until 455, when the Vandals and their king, Genseric, subjected the helpless city to an unprecedented two-week plunder. They stripped Rome of all its glamour, carrying away not only the gold and silver but also all iron, lead, and bronze objects. Even the princesses from the palace were included in the loot. Everything that attracted the eye or had been a symbol of Rome's magnificence and world power was destroyed, plundered, broken, or carried away as booty. Nothing was left of Rome but the name – a name that could not be destroyed.

The image of Rome is one of the best examples of how ideas are more



important than physical reality and how they can change it. For example, when Constantine the Great transferred the capital to the East he built nothing other than a "new Rome". The name of Byzantium and its ten-century long history had been wiped out simply by the formal act of "transferring" Rome from the old to the new place. Even the fact that most of New Rome's subjects had never seen Italy or Rome did not matter. They all proudly called themselves "Romans". However, as they spoke mainly Greek, the word "Romans" sounded like "Romaics." What is more, they would blame the Romans of the western provinces for having let the Barbarians eclipse Rome's glamour, and would often scornfully call them "Latins".

In the West, the higher the political chaos grew, the more topical the idea of Rome became. All attempts at uniting the divided western world were made in that holy name. It served equally well the Barbarian kings and the Roman bishop (the Pope). Thus the Middle Ages were to be filled with "Roman empires" which contemporary historians name variously: Byzantine empire, Frankish empire, German empire. While at the beginning the holy name of Rome made the Church and the Barbarian kings unite their

efforts, later it turned into a source of rivalry between them. In the name of Rome popes would try to impose their power over their neighbours. In a few centuries these aspirations would give birth to a peculiar political creation, the Holy Roman Empire of the German People.

Throughout the Middle Ages Rome was to be the symbol of unity. The name's long life was due to the extraordinary ability of medieval people to invent the reality they would like to live in, and they believed in it as firmly as they believed in the sunrise and the sunset. Only that kind of belief could keep the destroyed city of Rome alive and even make it speak as a human being: "All the past is gone. In Rome there is no memory of Rome left. I myself have forgotten about myself during that decline. But my defeat is to me much more valuable than victory. In my fall I am more glorious than the haughty; in my poverty I am richer than Croesus. The gonfalon has given me more than the eagles (of the emperors), the apostles – more than Caesar. Even the unarmed people gave me more than the victorious ruler. Earlier I ruled in my prime over the earthly bodies of the people, while now, having fallen in the dust, I rule over their souls". (Hildebert de Lavardaigne, 12th c.)





## THE HOLY EMPIRE – BYZANTIUM (MIDDLE OF THE 5TH TO END OF 6TH CENTURIES)

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### **A** The captured symbols – Odoacer

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At the end of the troubled 5th century there was an event that went almost unnoticed by contemporaries but which historians today often judge as the end of the Roman Empire. In 476 Odoacer (433-493), one of the Barbarians who at that time was in command of Roman legions, dethroned from the western Roman Empire Romulus Augustulus, a minor. To express his loyalty, the Barbarian sent the dethroned emperor's symbols of power to Constantinople with the words: "Like the sun is one in the sky, so should the emperor be one on earth". The Byzantine emperor responded to Odoacer's act of loyalty by giving him the title of patrician and the right to rule Italy as provincial governor on behalf of Constantinople.

Victorious Odoacer was well aware of what he was doing. Italy at the time was nothing but an agglomerate of territories and it came by right as booty to its conqueror. However, the sceptre and crown, the symbols of imperial power, were a different matter. They could not be added to the booty since their meanings were divine in origin. Therefore, encroaching upon them would have meant usurpation, sacrilege, and betrayal of God.

Odoacer's contemporaries were extremely sensitive to the concept of order as life in the 5th century was becoming more and more chaotic. The Empire, especially in the west, was less and less capable of maintaining order in its own territories. The will for order confronted actual disorder. Rome's fame as a symbol of order and civilization continuously grew in the perceptions of both Romans and Barbarians. For some time it was as if this ideal replaced the real world.

### **B** Unity of faith against unity of force

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Byzantium never needed political unity so badly as in the middle of the fifth century. The pressure of the Barbarians along its northern borders had become uncontrollable. Particularly dangerous were the Goths. They had been long creating trouble in the Balkan provinces, but when at the end of the 5th century they were united by ambitious Theodoric (471-526), they became irresistible. Several times their attacks had reached the capital itself. It had cost a lot of gold and effort to turn the mighty Gothic king to Italy where he was to eventually establish his own state. Yet the memory of the terrible threat remained. In the beginning of the 6th century a special fortified wall was built around Constantinople. The inhabitants



of Byzantium soon called it “the wall of shame”. The name itself showed the Byzantines’ fear of the Barbarians.

In the middle of the 5th century the situation along the eastern boundaries was no less alarming. The conflict with their old enemy, the powerful Persian Empire, had escalated dramatically. Moreover, Byzantium’s defense system in Armenia and Syria had been seriously undermined by religious discord.

At that time of intensified pressure both in the north and the east, a new policy was outlined before the emperors in Constantinople: the policy of religious compromise. In 482 Emperor Zeno (474–491) enforced a law aimed at making peace between the central power and the rebellious eastern provinces. He allowed both Orthodox bishops and heretics to preach freely. However, solving problems of faith through compromise only resulted in deeper divergence. The Monophysites’ unrest would not stop. On the other hand, on the Balkans and Asia Minor, where the population anxiously guarded Orthodoxy, discontent was stirring up against the emperors.

The situation was most dramatic in Constantinople. Under Emperor Anastasius (491–518) who continued his predecessor’s policy, the Orthodox population’s discontent in the capital grew into open rebellion. The furious inhabitants destroyed all the statues of the emperor and openly accused him of violating his sacred duty to defend the purity of faith. Terrified, Anastasius appeared before the people bareheaded. His repentance in public would save him from retribution.

At the beginning of the 6th century it became clear that working out compromises with Orthodoxy was not the solution to the Empire’s problems. It was then that the star of Justinian rose – he whom later generations would call “the Great”.



## **Justinian the Great (527–565): the ‘restoration’ doctrine**

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Fascinated by Rome’s glorious past, Emperor Justinian (527–565) would center all his policies on the idea of the Empire’s special mission and its reunification. His words – “We are hopeful that God will bring us back the lands dominated by the ancient Romans, extending up to the two oceans” – clearly expressed the goals of his military campaigns. However, unlike his predecessors, Justinian turned west. Firmly backing Orthodoxy, Justinian found an important ally in the Roman Church, whose support gave Justinian’s policy for the “restoration of the West” a great boost.

In 533–534 his greatest general, Belisarius, destroyed Vandal Africa and recovered that country for the Empire. That was the first step towards Justinian’s ambitious political plan to reunite Mediterranean lands. His plan clearly showed the old Roman ambition to turn the Mediterranean Sea into an “internal lake” of the Empire. The following two decades (536–555) were spent conquering the Goths in Italy and southern Spain. By 555 the campaign ended successfully and the Roman Empire seemed reunited. The West was again under Constantinople rule.

But what the sword had conquered had to be officially established. So Justinian set out to draw the code of Roman law. The *Corpus Juris Civilis* came out in 529 and through it, the legacy of Roman Law has come down to the present. The laws of Justinian’s *Corpus* in fact form the basis of much modern legislation. Like all Roman laws, the *Corpus* was written in Latin. Following the spirit of the epoch, each law had an introduction mentioning its true creator who, according to their concepts, was God. In this way, under Justinian the



process of merging faith and law, begun under Theodosius, was completed. In the 6th century law resembled a theological treatise. Christianity had changed the spirit of the law. Law theory went beyond the narrow conceptual bounds of the exclusive rights of one people – the basis of earlier Roman Law. The evangelical principle that all people are equal before God inspired a new formulation: “By law of nature all people are equal before the law and before God”.

One of the most important principles of humanity, i.e. that law and justice apply to everyone, was born of a sixth-century emperor’s Christian faith and conviction that it was possible to unite the world politically under one power.

Finally, as if unsatisfied with his achievements, and to crown his life’s work, Justinian built the temple of St Sophia. Its huge dome was supported by special coloured columns whose capitals had been brought from all four quarters of the empire: Rome, Syria, Egypt and other parts. The temple was to be the image of the united Christian world. The only one of its kind, the basilica demonstrated that restoration was possible only under the power of the Church.

## **D** The Holy Empire: a glance from Ravenna

Justinian’s military, legislative, and building activities seemed to have created order and anticipated the medieval world. People were able to see the abundant fruit of the union between the empire and Orthodoxy. In the 6th century these two powers would form the most durable medieval doctrine, the doctrine of the Holy Empire. The Empire would be considered the beginning of God’s kingdom and its reflection on earth. We cannot understand this abstract formula today but to the medieval people it had a number of specific features.

Some can be seen from a mosaic work in Ravenna in northern Italy, dating from Justinian’s rule. It was inlaid on the walls of the church San Vitale, built during Justinian’s reign. It portrays Justinian, his wife, Theodora, and the court. There they are all dressed alike, with pale intent faces. Not even the gentlest hint is made that those figures would want to or can move. The impression is further reinforced by the even golden background.

In the Ravenna mosaic there is nothing except for the gold background, showing the royal luxury that must have surrounded Justinian. The mosaic is poor in means of expression but nevertheless, like every Christian work of art, laden with meaning. In the first place, this is not actually a portrait of the emperor and his court, but a portrait of the imperial power itself. Taken alone, the emperor’s personality was of no interest to his subjects neither in Ravenna nor anywhere else in the Empire. What mattered was that he had been empowered by God to rule the holy Empire. The emperor was only God’s servant and his dress, in the views of the time, had to look like a uniform. Under the long dress one could not tell if the body was thin or fat—that did not really matter. What mattered was his duty: ruling the Empire. In addition to the royal tiara, there is a halo around the emperor’s head, showing the holy origin of his power.

The rigid figures of the Ravenna mosaic also defined order. Their rigidity artistically expressed the concept that order established by God on earth was sacred, perfect, not to be amended; it could only be protected. Beyond that stood God and people had no access, just as their eyes could not see behind the mosaic’s glittering golden background.

Admirers of the ancient world sometimes accuse Justinian of having abandoned it. They frequently state he abolished the academy of Athens at the



same time he built the basilica of St Sophia. There are different opinions about this. St Sophia, however, had been built to satisfy the spiritual needs of many more people than the students served by the academy of Athens throughout its existence.

## **E** The Holy Empire: a glance from the Balkans

In the middle of the 6th century, while Ravenna experienced its magnificent rise, Byzantium's Balkan provinces were hit by a disastrous series of natural calamities. In 542 A.D. plague devastated the cities. With every passing day the Balkan subjects of the Byzantine emperor thinned in number. The Black Death even penetrated into the imperial palace. On the Balkan peninsula death had become daily routine and fear had settled lastingly in people's hearts. Archaeologists have noted that most of the flourishing towns and cities of that period fell into decay. The only construction work carried out in those lands was the building of fortified walls.

But walls could hardly be a barrier to disease. Actually, the survivors built them in order to stop another terrible disaster as devastating as the plague and coming from the north: the Slavs. In the middle of the sixth century nothing any longer prevented their penetrating the Balkan provinces. But unlike other Barbarians whose aim was chiefly places for settlement, Slavs would attack imperial territories, pillage everything they came across, then retire quickly with the loot to their settlements across the Danube, leaving behind nothing but piles of burning rubble. The Empire faced something hellish. For a long time educated Byzantine intellectuals would associate Slavs with fears about their savage attacks. But were the Slavs complete strangers?

The Slavs were a major branch of the Indo-European family. Their original homeland can be traced to areas of today's Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. Around the first century A.D. three separate branches formed: western, eastern, and southern Slavs. In approximately the same period their movements and new settlements reached the boundaries of the Roman Empire, and they began to be mentioned in the writings of ancient authors by the names of Venedi (western Slavs), Antae (eastern Slavs), and Sklavenoi (southern Slavs).

In the period between the 3rd and 5th centuries Slavs already occupied vast areas of Central and Eastern Europe. Their further expansion left an indelible imprint on Europe's cultural identity. At the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century, Slavs populated huge territories in the former Roman provinces of Dacia (Romania) and Pannonia (Hungary), and they often crossed the Danube to plunder and destroy Roman provinces south of it. The Empire, engaged in Justinian's wars in the west, underestimated the danger coming from the Slavs. The three fortified walls built during that period along the Danube and in the Balkan Range and Thrace did not prevent Slavs from crossing the Balkan provinces for a whole decade in the mid-sixth century (545-555 A.D.) Their pressure would not weaken even when, in the 560s and 570s, the Avars succeeded in imposing their rule, including them within their boundaries with its centre in Pannonia.

In 586, the Slavs went so far as to besiege Salonika, the Empire's second biggest city on the Balkans. They interrupted the city's communications with the Empire's capital and according to contemporaries, Salonika was rescued only thanks to the support of its patron saint, St. Demetrius of Salonika. Finally, emperors in Constantinople undertook mea-



asures to stop Slav incursions for good. Under Maurice (Maurikios) (582-602), a good eight years saw a number of military operations against the Slavs. The imperial legions pushed the persevering invaders beyond the Danube. Their victory brought the Balkan provinces the promise they would finally find relief from the

horror of Slav devastations. Very soon, however, in 602, a revolt of the Byzantine Danubian legions weakened the Empire's border along the Danube, and thus the barrier to Slav raids was removed. Soon the Slavs would penetrate the Empire and reach the southernmost parts of the Balkan peninsula.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. *Why did Odoacer return the insignia of power back to Constantinople?*
2. *Where did Justinian the Great's predecessors go wrong in their efforts to assure the stability of the Empire?*
3. *Describe Justinian's policy to restore the unity of the Roman Empire.*
4. *How do the frescoes of the San Vitale Basilica reflect the Holy Empire doctrine?*
5. *In what way did the raids of the Slavs differ from those of other Barbarians?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The three wonders of Constantinople**

Contemporaries said there were three marvels in Constantinople (the "New Rome"): God had the basilica of St Sophia, the emperor had his golden palace, and the people had their hippodrome.

The hippodrome was the Byzantine "theatre". It was there the emperor met his people. It was there the people would often demand a reduction of taxes or the punishment of some wrongful official. The hippodrome was the place where victories over the enemy were celebrated. Endless processions of prisoners of war and booty marched in the vast arena before the eyes of the people. With the tip of his purple boot the emperor would touch the heads of captured rulers as a sign of removing their power and depriving them of their rights. It was there that the emperor was sometimes proclaimed emperor, where he administered justice. It was often at the hippodrome that capital punishments took place.

The hippodrome was also the place where chariot races were held. Those were events that excited the whole capital. People were divided into parties which united hundreds of members, fans of the same jockeys. Frequently religious and political partialities were added to sports preferences. Each party had its own colour, and the strongest were the blue and the green parties. The spectators of a certain party sat in the same place, dressed in the respective colour. Often bloody skirmishes flared up. Many of the rebellions in the Byzantine empire also used to start from the hippodrome. When a new emperor came to a chariot race for the first time, people were eager to see his preferences. In time the emperors would manage to master the parties.

The palace of the Byzantine emperors represented a complicated system of buildings and apartments: a dining-room, bedrooms, reception halls, gardens, bathrooms, a throne-room, and many churches.



The architectural complex was built in the course of six centuries, from the 4th to the 9th centuries. The numerous imperial buildings were separated from the city by a high wall. Inside the wall were vast grounds with fountains where people gathered during official ceremonies when the emperor left the palace to go to the service in St Sophia. The gates of the palace were called "holy gates" and similarly to the gates of the altar\*, they would open at certain definite hours of the day. The rest of the time they used to hide from the common people what was happening inside the palace. The palace buildings were lavishly decorated with mosaics. The magnificent imperial apartments had white marble floors and golden ceilings, supported by plenty of columns. According to a tradition handed down from Roman emperors, all ceremonies were held on the second floor. The style of the throne-room imitated church architecture and was topped with a dome; the imperial throne, located in its eastern part, was full of relics that accentuated the room's holy nature. They called the throne-room the "golden chamber". The Porphyra chamber was assigned to Byzantine empresses where children were born so that they became Porphyrogenites (born in the purple) and acquired the rights to succession.

The basilica of St Sophia is one of the most remarkable monuments of Byzantine and European architecture and even today impresses us with its grandeur and magnificence. It is the most famous Orthodox Christian church, built by the order of Justinian the Great between 532 and 537. The church is 140 metres long and 72 metres wide. Dominating the middle of the building is a huge dome, 30 metres in diameter and 60 metres high. The colonnade supporting the dome formed a vast auditorium in which believers gathered. It was richly decorated with mosaic figures of the Christ, Virgin Mary, and the saints against a golden backdrop.

The ceremonial dress of the emperor and the insignia of imperial power were kept in St Sophia. The crowning of the emperor also took place in the basilica at a solemn ceremony, accompanied by religious songs and the burning of incense. The basilica of St Sofia had been designed to represent the ideal world, God's world created for Man: the place where unity with the Creator should be achieved. Procopius of Caesarea (a 6th century author) wrote in his "About the buildings", "Each time one enters this temple to pray, one immediately becomes aware that this is a creation made not by human effort or art, but by God's will".

## WORKSHOP:

### **The Christian Empire**

**Task No.1:** Self-test your knowledge. Choose the level you want to test:

#### **Satisfactory**

1. List the names of three emperors
2. What event is associated with the years, listed below:

313      395      602

3. What is the meaning of VANDALISM?
4. Describe the Christian church, taking into account (i) the type of early Christian temples; (ii) new church construction style in the 4th and 5th centuries; and (iii) interior church decoration.

*(If you cannot answer the above questions, please refer to the study material learnt so far.)*



**Good**

1. Constantine the Great was a contemporary of:
  - a) The Great migration of peoples;
  - b) the Nicene Council;
  - c) Julian the Apostate.
2. What event is associated with the years, listed below:     212       380     451

*(If you have succesfully answered the questions above try and answer at least one of the questions from the following level. You must have underestimated yourself.)*

**Excellent**

1. The founder of monasticism is:
  - a) Gregory of Nyssa;
  - b) Anthony the Great;
  - c) Eusebius of Caesarea.
2. What event is associated with the years, listed below:  
                 325     361-363       555

3. What is the meaning of ECUMENICAL COUNCIL?
4. Describe the "Hexad," taking into account (i) the time in which those works appeared; (ii) their contents; (iii) their purpose and significance. Also, (iv) name some authors.

3. What is the meaning of BIBLE?
4. Explain the nature of the conflict between the Empire and its eastern provinces, taking into account (i) Christianity and the spiritual world of the eastern peoples; (ii) the big eastern heresies: the Monophysites and the Nestorians; and (iii) the emperors and the eastern provinces: policy of force and policy of compromise.

*(Congratulations! You are definetely a "history" fan!  
This will help you become a well-read and erudite person.)*

**Task No. 2:** Give a written answer to the following question:

How was the Christian empire's doctrine formed and what was its nature?

You could use the following plan in your answer:

- the birth of the Christian empire's political doctrine: "The Law on Orthodox Faith";
- The Church and the emperors: unity of faith or unity of power;
- the epoch of Justinian the Great: unity of faith, power and law;
- the basilica of St Sophia as a symbol of the Christian empire;
- the mosaic of the San Vitale Church: the conception of imperial power.



## 9

## REALITY AGAINST THE EMPIRE – PART I: THE BIRTH OF THE WEST (4TH to 9TH CENTURIES)

### **A** Barbarian kingdoms: strategy of survival

Political and ethnic confusion during the Great migration of peoples ultimately resulted in the formation of the first Barbarian kingdoms: of Goths, Vandals, Burgundians, Suevi, Alamanni. The Barbarians who would permanently settle in the Empire and the local populations represented two worlds with different cultures and traditions, living together by virtue of conquest. Neither the Barbarian efforts to copy Roman glamour, nor the Christian conversion of most of them during their imperial service, would wipe out the differences between them and the Romans. Life in both communities would continue to be subject to different laws.

The short life of the first Barbarian kingdoms, which emerged and vanished in the period from the 6th to the 8th centuries, was largely due to their incapacity to overcome the separate existence of the two large groups of subjects. Wherever circumstances had forced their merger, social tension became intolerable and such a kingdom usually lost its stability.

That was the case of the Goths, who created the first European Barbarian kingdoms in the 5th-6th centuries, in the territory between Italy and Spain. Those were areas densely populated with Gallo-Romans. There were no free areas for

new settlers nor extra land for cultivating, so the Goths had to confiscate two thirds of the property of the local population to ensure their own subsistence. In addition, the conflict was aggravated by religious differences. The local inhabitants stuck to Orthodoxy and their spiritual center was Rome. On the other hand, Aryanism had already widely spread among the Goths as early as the time of their conversion to Christianity as Roman *foederati*.

In this way, not only were they conquerors but heretics. This could only intensify discontent from their rule and predetermine the early end of their kingdoms. They would collapse one after the other in Italy in the middle of the 6th century (555) under the pressure of the Byzantine army, and in Spain, in the beginning of the 8th century under the pressure of the Arabs. Most of the other early Barbarian kingdoms met a similar fate.

The Frankish kingdom was founded in far more favourable circumstances. In the course of their settling, the Franks occupied the much less populated territories of North Gaul (today's northern France). The Franks settled close to Roman towns. There was plenty of arable land so they rarely had to confront the local inhabitants. The foundation of the Frankish state is associated with Clovis (481-511), the third ruler of the Merovingian dynasty (mid-5th c. to mid-8th c.), who succeeded



in uniting all the Franks under his power in the beginning of the 6th century.

The Frankish kings found less painful ways to integrate the local population. The local Romano-Gaulish population was allowed to keep its internal structure unchanged and in return, they included their army in the Frankish army. The same conditions were applied to the conquered neighbour Barbarians. Besides, Clovis did not always rely on the force of arms. The ambitious ruler had managed to obtain the support of the Church by officially converting to Christianity in 500 A.D. In this way, Clovis' wars against his neighbours turned into wars against the Aryan heretics, so local bishops gave him wholehearted support.

## **B** Two worlds on the road to one society: the Frankish society

In the Frankish kingdom the local population and the barbarians differed in their main economic activities. While the local inhabitants were primarily farmers, the Barbarians were generally stock-breeders. Stock-breeding not only secured property that could be easily taken away in case of moving, but was also an obvious sign of wealth. Even when land later became the main criterion of wealth, in some regions as late as the 18th and 19th centuries, the cow continued to be the main currency equivalent in deals or in property evaluation.

Being new settlers, the Franks were afraid of being assimilated by the local population. That is why they avoided settling in towns. The desire to keep a separate existence was clearly imprinted in early medieval legislation. In the Frankish kingdom people were not subject to one law which applied to all the inhabitants in the territory. Every person was judged according to his own community's laws: the

Frank, according to Frankish law; the Burgundian, according to Burgundian law; and the Gallo-Romans, according to Roman law. That led to many absurdities: the same crime leading to different punishments. For instance, a Gaul would be sentenced to death for rape, while the Burgundian would be fined. The chaos in social relations was one of the causes for the general moral decline during the early Middle Ages. In addition, morality would also be influenced by the Barbarian taste for cruelty. Refined tortures of the epoch became a source of inspiration for iconography\* throughout the Middle Ages. Christian Franks would outdo pagan Romans in the torture of their victims.

In his "History of the Franks" (6th c.), Gregory, Bishop of Tours, gives us an idea of what Barbarian society was like. The king stood at the head of the Frank state. His image incorporated the warrior and the ruler, merged into one person. The king was above all the military commander of a specific ethnic group, not the ruler of specific territories. That is why it is no surprise that the Franks had no state boundaries or a capital. The capital was where the king and the royal court were. The Assembly of the people – the assembly of the free peasant-warriors entitled to political rights – was the other important institution of the Frank state, and it acted jointly with the king at the annual Field of Mars celebration. The assembly made decisions on the most important issues in conformity with common law, inscribed in the 6th century and known as the Salic law. The king was elected by the assembly.

In the 6th century after Clovis, succession to the throne was already governed by the dynastic principle: the king was elected among the Merovingians. The Frankish king was proclaimed king by the soldiers who raised him on their shields. Instead of a sceptre and a diadem, the Frankish king carried only a spear. The only distinguishing mark was his long hair.



A kind of Samson, wearing long hair, travelling from one estate to another, surrounded by a few scribes, some royal household servants and a small royal guard: that is how contemporaries saw Clovis' successors. Ornate titles were borrowed from the Roman imperial vocabulary: high constable, majordomo, count palatine, counts and dukes. Together they were called the "Notables". The king's riches lay locked in chests full of gold coins, which after his death were fought over by his legitimate and illegitimate wives and children. Succession to the throne was settled as a matter of property inheritance. Upon Clovis' death, the Frankish state was divided among his four sons as if it had been their private heritage.

## **C** The Roman Church and its mission

In the chaos of Barbarian invasions, bishops and monks became the main leaders of the crumbling society. In addition to their religious role, bishops introduced a number of other tasks: political – they frequently held negotiations with the Barbarians; economic – they distributed food and donations; and social – they defended the weak against the "men of the day". Occasionally they would even organize the military defense against invaders. By force of circumstance the Church had assumed certain powers of secular authority, but it preserved most of the organizational structures of society: Roman law, the territorial division and hierarchical organization of local governmental structures, and the Latin language and culture. Towns were practically governed by the bishops. The people would approach them about religious, administrative, and judicial matters. Bishops tried their best to implement traditions of good conduct and penance in the struggle against violence and brutal customs and manners. Numerous collections of instructive works were written aimed at

influencing all social strata, from the peasant to the king himself, and they were to remain extremely popular throughout the Middles Ages.

The organization of the dioceses, however, was not very stable. Despite the Church's desire to preserve the original Roman provinces within the individual dioceses, that was impossible due to their frequent redistribution among differing Barbarian kingdoms. On the other hand, in the West, monasteries remained firm and unchangeable. Built faraway from towns, they had conserved old arts and crafts, their libraries had preserved classical literature and the writing of history, and thanks to their landed property and technology for cultivation, they became not only religious centres but also model farms.

Monastic communities lived following the strict rules of monastic life. One of the most widespread rules was the rule of St Benedict of Nursia (480-547). The Benedictine Rule clearly distinguished monastic orders from itinerant ascetics and rejected exaggerated asceticism. It was within the powers of ordinary men who loved God, and monks did not need to mutilate either body or spirit. Emphasis was put on achieving harmony between manual labour, intellectual activities, and religious worship and prayer. Monks raised animals and did agricultural work, copied manuscripts in the monastery library, taught in the schools set up at the monasteries, and prayed and attended mass daily.

In the middle of the 6th century monasteries became an important center for the spread of Christianity. At monasteries were converted most of the barbarians within the old boundaries of the Roman Empire, who traditionally lived away from urban areas and the influence of the bishoprics. Only one century later, as a result of the monasteries, most of the Barbarian peoples outside of the Empire had embraced Christian faith.



## **D** The christianizers of Western Europe

As early as the mid-fifth century, a monk succeeded in christianizing the pagan population in faraway Ireland, transforming it into an "island of saints". St Patrick's success lay, in part, in his adjusting the christening ritual to the pagans' customs and traditions. Many Irish people, for example, were christened by St Patrick to the sound of the traditional Irish drums.

Later, many monks entrusted with the mission of gathering Barbarians to the Church would follow St Patrick's example. They would utilize music and some of the new converts' rites and would lighten the strict requirements of the fast. Under Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), church service included music. Gregorian singing made Christian rituals more accessible and attractive for Barbarians whose former celebrations used to be accompanied by song.

However, Pope Gregory's most important legacy was his mobilizing the monasteries' full capacities, making them work to fulfill the Church's policy of converting Barbarians outside the Roman Empire. Gregory himself was a monk and in his time many monks had been assigned key posts in papal administration. The Pope used to entrust to them important missions among the Barbarians.

One of the most famous missionaries\* at the end of the 6th century was Augustine, a monk the pope sent to christen England. In 597, when Augustine landed in the kingdom of Kent, there were a multitude of Anglo-Saxon king-

doms on the island. They were all pagan and presented a rather hostile environment. Augustine carried out his mission as best he could. He baptized the king and with the king's help he began christening the king's subjects. Canterbury became the center of the English church. One more local church began under the direct supervision of Rome.

A century later, the Church in England would be so successful that it would send missionaries to the lands east of the Rhine River. Those areas were populated with Germans similar to the Anglo-Saxons. The spreading of Christianity among them in the 7th century was the work of the monk, St. Boniface of Wessex (680-755). His sermons attracted many followers in Bavaria and Franconia. In the middle of the 8th century most of the Germans' local churches were united by the archbishopric of Mainz. Its first archbishop was St. Boniface himself. Thus in the 8th century the German church was born. Rome's authority in the western world had no rival. The work of several generations of monks acquired for Rome a spiritual power which, in the 8th century, spread far beyond the old Roman Empire.

The Barbarian kings appreciated the Church's role in building the foundations of the new civilization. They granted the Church certain privileges such as exemption from taxes, and donated royal lands to the Church. In this way the western Church gradually built up its economic and administrative power, which later enabled it to fight with the emperors for political power over the Christians under its charge.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. *Why did the early Barbarian kingdoms not last long?*
2. *Compare the life of the Romano-Gaulish and the Barbarian populations.*
3. *Describe the organization of the Barbarian kingdom, using the Frankish state as example.*
4. *Why did the Church play an important role in the edification of the society in the West?*
5. *How did Rome's spiritual power expand?*



## FACES OF HISTORY:

### Boethius, or the art of translating

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480-525) used to be called by his contemporaries "the last Roman", while appreciative generations have included his name among the most respected philosophers of the medieval West. Born of a long line of Roman aristocratic ancestors, he was a highly educated person. Christian culture is very much indebted to this pagan. Not only did he justify the necessity of education but he also wrote textbooks on arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. In his attempt to give philosophy mathematical logic, in discovering the correlation of faith with reason, he also became the "father" of Christian scholasticism\*. Although there is not the slightest hint about any Christian idea in his celebrated work, "De Consolatione Philosophiae," written shortly before his death, it served poets and prose writers throughout the Middle Ages as a model of style. Was that another paradox \* of history?

Like most talented people, Boethius, too, did not live to receive recognition. He died in agony, condemned on suspicion of plotting and put to death. The dignity with which he met death also became an example often referred to by subsequent generations. His early end interrupted the realization of his ambitious plan to translate Plato and Aristotle into Latin. However, what is important is the spirit of the epoch Boethius lived in: the desire to translate the Greek philosophers.

The spiritual unity of the ancient world was preserved, despite the agony of its political consolidator, the Roman Empire. In that world the Greek language was comparable to 'Esperanto'\*. Intellectuals learned it in their schooling, while the common people learned it through active trade exchange in the cities. Every Roman from Asia Minor to South Spain who was interested in philosophy could read the Greek philosophers in translation. Apparently, things had changed in the West in the 5th century. In spite of the reputation of Ostrogoth King Theodoric (471-526), who "ruled Italy like a genuine Roman", the lands under his power were part of a new Western world whose relationship with the political and spiritual roots of ancient civilization were beginning to break off. West and East were beginning to speak "different" languages and free cultural exchange required translation. Boethius' undertaking to hand down the legacy of ancient philosophy to that new world was actually the endeavor of the "last Roman" to re-establish his own world's unity.

Destiny dictated that Boethius should leave his work unfinished. That is why the Western world received only parts of Aristotle's works in translation. His rationalism\* became the great pride of medieval western thought. However, no one dares guess what might have happened to the development of western philosophy if Boethius had begun to translate Plato's works first.



## 10

## REALITIES AGAINST THE EMPIRE *PART TWO:* BULGARIAN KHANATES (7TH TO EARLY 8TH CENTURIES)

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### **A** The long road to Europe: the Bulgars

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By the end of the seventh century the fate of the Byzantine Balkan provinces was permanently associated with a new people, the Bulgars, a tribe of Turkic Altai origin whose name had already been mentioned in ancient Chinese chronicles. Around the end of the first and the beginning of the second centuries A.D. the Bulgars set off west together with other peoples unified under the rule of the Huns. They reached Eastern Europe with the first migration wave in the middle of the 4th century. It was there they were first noticed by Byzantine and western chroniclers, mentioned for their fighting as Hun warriors.

At the end of the 5th century, after Attila's death and the disintegration of the Hun state, the Bulgars retreated into eastern Europe. They settled permanently in the Black Sea steppes, the lands north of the Caucasus, and from there conducted frequent raids into the Byzantine Balkan provinces. They were to become particularly dangerous towards the end of Justinian's rule. In 558-559, led by Zabergan, the Bulgars even attacked Constantinople, penetrating its defences and camping in its suburbs. Old general Belisarius was the only one to succeed in driving them out.

On their way west, the Bulgars joined several tribal alliances of peoples migrating from the east, and had thus scattered in Europe from Pannonia to the Caucasus. Their presence in that vast area has been identified by archeologists. Traces of their cultural legacy can be found in diverse places, and Bulgarian treasures are fascinating. Extravagant in the use of gold, silver, and precious stones, the treasures actually consist of only a few objects, mainly vessels, jewelry, and armour ornaments: items easy to carry on a long journey. And the Bulgars were doomed to be on the road.

### **B** Dynamic relationships: the Bulgarian society

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Bulgarian treasures have created disputes, the major one concerning which cultural tradition they belonged to since Bulgarian art blended components of steppe, Persian, and Byzantine plastic arts – which complement each other in a natural and unique way. The Bulgars' ability to absorb cultural patterns and techniques from diverse traditions and arrange them according to their own preferences was extremely important. That ability provides clear evidence of the Bulgars' cultural dynamics. But what was such a dynamics due to? The answer to that question



should be sought in the structure of the Bulgarian society.

The basic unit of the Bulgarian society was the clan, which consisted of several familial communities. Its members were closely bound by the cult of revering ancestors and the common ownership of property. The clan was administered by clan leaders (paterfamilias) called "boils" and the most talented soldiers, called "bagains". To the Bulgars the clan had been the basis of social life from the remote past. They believed one could not endure hardships and ordeals without the support of their families.

The Bulgars had been subjected to hardships and ordeals for a long time. In the course of several centuries (from the 2nd to the 5th centuries) they had migrated slowly from Central Asia to Italy. Their movement had been accompanied by endless wars with hostile peoples. The only ones to survive the long journey westward were those who had united in a tribe. Survival was the tribe's responsibility. Strong relations between individual clans were required. And so was unity. The Bulgars succeeded in establishing that unity around a common religious cult. All Bulgarian tribes worshipped one supreme deity: Tangra. The Bulgars believed Tangra was the protector of victories, the maker of the sky and the earth, the omniscient supreme sovereign of man. Contacts with Tangra were established by the shamans\*. Because of their important mission and special talent, those doctor-priests formed a separate class of the Bulgarian society.

On earth Tangra had one live incarnation: the Khan of the Bulgars. The Bulgars believed the Khan had supernatural power bestowed upon him by Tangra himself to rule his people. Only if the supreme god withdrew his support for the khan could a general assembly of all clans elect a new khan. But while the Khan possessed his extraordinary heavenly power, he enjoyed full authority over the Bulgars who re-

garded him as supreme priest, military commander, and legislator.

The Bulgars followed their own calendar with a 12-year cycle. Its presence shows that they had a clear notion of conceiving time in longer cycles. Such a notion was necessary when a society left the comparatively more restricted clan frames. Obviously, the Bulgars had to organize larger groups of people, tribes, and tribal unions, which would have been impossible without a unified system of organized space and time.



## Ancient Great Bulgaria

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When Europe heard about the Bulgars they already had their own ancient state tradition, which was recorded in a special text, "Register of Bulgarian Khans". The beginning of the Bulgarian state system is linked with Attila. It is from him that the legendary ruling clan, Doulo, originated. Under the leadership of Koubrat (632–663?) of the Doulo clan, the Bulgars in the northern Caucasian region were united in the beginning of the 630s. In 632 A.D. a Bulgarian khanate\* was set up in the lands between the Dnestr and the Kuban rivers north of the Black Sea, known as Ancient Great Bulgaria. The Bulgarian khanate was founded on the military tribal alliance of the Bulgars with related tribes. The khanate was divided into several large regions, each ruled by one of the khan's sons. The khan controlled the central power from Phanagoria, the centre of the state where Khan Koubrat had established his camp.

Owing to its strong state organization Khan Koubrat's Great Bulgaria would last for three decades in lands through which spread the Great migration of peoples. Koubrat also ruled over numerous Turkomans and Khazars who settled in those lands for different periods of time. Byzantium would never be able to



control that region of constant movement and ever new Barbarians, and would find it harder than ever in the 7th century when all the Empire's forces would be warring in the East. The Empire saw then in Great Bulgaria an opportunity to acquire some control over the influx of Barbarians. For that reason Bulgarian Khan Koubrat was often a much sought-after ally. In 635 Emperor Heraclius even conferred the title of "patrician" on the khan of the Bulgars.

After the death of Koubrat, Great Bulgaria was destroyed by the Khazars. One group of the Bulgars subjected themselves to Khazar rule. Another group set out in search for new settlements along the Volga River, establishing a Volga-Bulgarian state which existed up to the 13th century.

Most known, however, is the third group of Bulgars which resisted Khazar pressure and in the late 660s, united around Asparouh (also Isperih), one of Koubrat's sons. They headed west and established themselves along the Lower Danube. The area between the estuaries of the Prout and Siret rivers became the new centre of the Bulgarian khanate. From there the Bulgars started systematically raiding lands south of the Danube River.

## **D** The daily routine of war: the Slavs

At the beginning of the 7th century the Slavs were permanently settled not only in the lands between the Danube River and the Balkan Range, but also in vast areas in Thrace, Macedonia, and North and Central Greece. Some Slav tribes had even reached Peloponnesus, the southernmost part of the Balkan Peninsula. The Seven Slav Tribes and the Severi had settled in the Danube plain, the Smoleni chose the Rhodope region and Thrace as their home, the Versiti and Sagudati moved into Macedonia, etc. Their military actions were becoming

more and more intimidating. There were even several attempts to capture Salonika, the second biggest city on the Balkans.

Historical sources say that the Slavs used to be a rather conservative ethnic community. They lived by hunting, fishing, and relatively primitive farming. The Slav settlements were usually built along rivers, around marshlands, or in woodlands—in other words, places that provided natural protection. The main type of housing was the dug-out, a rough dwelling dug out of a slope or a river bank. The Slavs used primitive building techniques. In spite of their many contacts with other cultures, the Slavs of that period still did not know the potter's wheel.

The Slav's religious tradition of that time comprised two types of deities: deities embodying the elements (such as lightning and rain), and deities embodying deified ancestors (mermaids, goblins). The Slavs, however, had no separate cult system (priests, shrines), which shows they made no clear distinction between the world of man and the world of magic.

Originally the Slavs lived in clans, in a kind of military democracy system. What some chroniclers called "democracy" and others called "want of will" was actually a familial community which, in settling the lands south of the Danube River, had gradually turned into territorial communes, the so-called "slavini." The territorial commune was related to a larger ethnic community, the tribe. The next step was establishing tribal alliances, usually for military reasons such as raids or defense.

The marked isolationism\* of Slav culture was due mainly to the exceptionally important role of war in the life of the Slavs. War marked all the institutions of power of the Slav society: the Knyaz (Prince) and the Assembly of the army. As circumstances would force Slavs to constantly defend their acquisitions, warfare remained their only contact with neighbouring peoples for a long time.



In spite of the fact that they had penetrated densely populated imperial territories, the Slavs had settled far from towns, usually in deserted lands. Living in such isolation, maintaining no contacts with local inhabitants, they preserved their traditional clan culture for a long time. The situation would begin to change only around the end of the 7th century due to reasons outside Slav society.

Although at the beginning of the 7th century the Empire had finally acknowledged the gravity of the Slav problem, it was still engaged in Eastern wars. In 658 A.D., however, Byzantium conducted a military expedition against the Slavs and showed it no longer underestimated the importance of the Slav problem.

## **E** Danube Bulgaria (681-718): the parameters of change

By the end of the 670s the raids of Asparouh's Bulgars on the lands south of the Danube River had become a serious threat to Byzantium. In 680 a retaliatory campaign was undertaken against their settlements in Ongula. At the head of the Byzantine army stood Emperor Constantine IV Poagonatus (668-685), the celebrated "saviour of the empire" because of his victories over the Arabs. By land and sea the huge Byzantine force reached Ongula. In the decisive battle, however, the Romaics suffered a crushing defeat. Khan Asparouh took advantage of the rout and continued his offensive southwards. His troops crossed the Danube, occupying the territories south of the river and up to the Balkan Range from where they continued their raids on Thrace. Bulgar pressure grew more and more threatening until in 681 a peace treaty was signed. Byzantium agreed to pay an annual tax guaranteeing an end to Bulgarian raids on the Empire. Moreover, in this way Byzantium

recognized the right of the Bulgars to occupy the lands they had gained possession of. Thus the Bulgarian Khanate spread its rule over vast territories north and south of the Danube River. The Khan's camp was moved from Ongula to Pliska. Such relocation clearly revealed the Khanate's new political orientation southwards towards Byzantium.

Although the Khanate's boundaries were not clearly defined, it undoubtedly included areas with a mainly Slav population. In return for being the Khan's subjects and submitting their fighting troops to his command, the Slavs were allowed to continue to live according to their old traditions, and their settlements remained governed by tribal customs, all internal Slav problems being settled by the knyaz.

On the other hand, the Bulgars also lived apart, following their own customs and traditions. Apparently the khan's subjects, Bulgars and Slavs, had united to engage in war rather than live together. Each people within the khanate kept its relative independence, which explains why at the beginning there were no conflicts. Actually, that was how all Barbarian states had been constituted in medieval Europe.

The presence of the Bulgarian Khanate in the northeastern part of the Balkan Peninsula brought the centuries-old hegemony of Byzantium there to an end. Unlike their predecessors, the Bulgarians had no interest in becoming part of the Empire and stuck to their own concept of society. The Empire was compelled to accept the new situation. Besides, the exceptional importance of the conflict in the East made it the more vitally important to Byzantium to win those strong Barbarians as allies.

Under Khan Tervel (701-718), the Bulgarians even helped the Byzantine emperor regain his throne. In return, the Empire gave its ally the Zagore region south of the Balkan Range. Khan Tervel was granted the title of Caesar, the second



highest rank after the emperor. Bulgaria became also a natural trade partner of Byzantium. Its reputation rose even higher

when in 718 the Arabs were pushed from their siege of Constantinople with the help of Bulgarian forces.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. Which was the Bulgarians' road to Europe?
2. Compare Bulgarian society to other Barbarian societies you know. What were the reasons for its stability?
3. What was the Bulgarian state tradition built on?
4. Describe the daily life of the Slavs. What did their conservatism result from?
5. Describe the characteristic features of the Barbarian state using the Bulgarian khanate as example.

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Nagy Szent Miklos Treasure**

The most interesting Bulgarian treasure was found near Nagy Szent Miklos in Banat (today in Hungary), about 200 years ago. Today it is kept in the Vienna Museum. There have been a lot of debates about this treasure. Researchers have found it difficult to determine the style of the 23 gold vessels included in the treasure, although they do not doubt that the treasure was created by Bulgarian craftsmen and that the noble Bulgarian it belonged to probably had buried it in the 9th century. It was then that the Hungarians invaded the lands around the central part of the Danube and Bulgarian power in those lands became tenuous.

From that point onwards the study of the treasure becomes difficult. Neither the forms nor the decorations can be classified as belonging to only one tradition. A more detailed analysis shows that there are three artistic styles: Persian, Turkic, and Early Byzantine. In terms of imagery, a Persian goddess can be seen next to a Turkic warrior, dragging a war prisoner by the hair, all of them existing together in peace with a Christian cross, borrowed from Byzantine artistic tradition.

From a technical point of view the mixing of different decorative styles is easy to explain. It could be presumed that the separate vessels had been manufactured by different craftsmen working in different artistic styles. What is more interesting is that whoever had been using those vessels made of precious metals had felt quite comfortable surrounded by all these cultures. In this respect the Nagy Szent Miklos treasure is a good example of the adaptability of Bulgarian culture. The Bulgarians had managed to turn their destiny which always made them live at the major crossroads of people into their own advantage. They borrowed much from all the cultures they came across on their road to Europe. What is more, they actually integrated them into their own cultural traditions. That is how they had created a unique world of centaurs\*, griffons\* and panthers, of Asian gods and Christian crosses, of heroic warriors and legendary rulers.

That vivid picture, which has caused so many problems for art critics, demonstrates how easy-going the Bulgarians were. The Bulgarian mind always included some new experience



or idea about the arrangement of the world. It is the feeling for orderliness that distinguished the Bulgarians from the other Barbarians. The Bulgarians did not share the aspirations of the Goths, the Vandals, and the other western

Barbarians to become part of the Empire which symbolized the order they had been dreaming of. The Bulgarians had their own ideas about social organization which is why they founded their own state.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# 11

### THE HOLY WAR: THE EASTERN CONFLICT IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY

#### **A** Heraclius (610 - 641)

In the beginning of the 7th century, only five decades after Justinian the Great's death, the Empire was in such a state that it seemed as if his legacy had been destroyed. Italy and the Balkan Peninsula were ravaged by the Barbarians, but the situation was worse in the eastern provinces. Armenia, Syria and Egypt were constantly attacked by the army of the Persian ruler Chosroes II (Khosru II) (590-628), called by his contemporaries the "Conqueror" ('Parviz' in Persian).

When Emperor Heraclius (610-641) came into power in 610, the Empire's fate was being decided by the wars in the East. The Persian attacks had reached their height. In Heraclius the Empire hoped it had finally found the power that would end the Eastern conflict. The Emperor himself led the Byzantine troops east. However, the Persians seemed invincible. In 614 they sacked the holy city of Jerusalem, bearing away the relic of the True Cross which was its most famous

treasure. The Persian king came out in person to meet the procession carrying the valuable treasure into the Persian capital. Chosroes was convinced his warriors had captured Christ himself and disarmed Byzantium. With a burst of energy the armies of Chosroes II then advanced on Constantinople. Their victorious march soon brought them to the Bosphorus strait. Heraclius had no choice but beg for peace. He offered to surrender all the Byzantine territories occupied by the Persians but was firmly turned down. There were no conditions, no negotiations, no compromise. The Persians were after the capital and the Empire. They had their own plausible reasons for wanting so much.

The conflict with the Persians was older than Byzantium itself. It was inherited from the Roman Empire. In the middle of the third century, power in Persia was taken over by the Sassanids (3rd-7th centuries). They had succeeded in politically consolidating the old Empire and in expanding its boundaries quickly from China to Byzantium and from the Caucasus to India. In accor-



dance with the Persian Empire's size and might its ruler's title became shah-in-shah ('king of the kings').

The Persians drew their inspiration and vigour from their religion. According to the Persians, life on earth was under the power of two deities: Ormuzd (Ahura Mazda), the god of goodness and light, and Ahriman, the god of darkness. They were in perpetual struggle for domination. It was during the Sassanian period that the complete sacred writings and religious teachings of the Parsees were inscribed in the Avesta. The book clearly shows the idea that in the end, light would triumph over darkness. But in order for that to happen, all other gods worshipped on earth must submit to Ormuzd. It was fully in the spirit of the time that the Persians believed followers of other gods were to submit themselves to the shah-in-shah, guardian of Ormuzd's sacred fire. At any rate, the king of the kings' most persuasive weapon to fulfill this mission was the Persian army.

That is why to the Persians, their war with Byzantium for acquiring new territories was merely background for the real conflict, the struggle to submit Christ to Ormuzd. The stakes were big and the conflict between the two imperial armies became a war for their holy sites and relics.

The open attempt at laying hands on Christian relics left the Byzantines with no doubt about the ultimate goal of the Persians. The Christian troops' defeats had been more and more frequently attributed to God's angrily punishing the Empire for its terrible sins.

Christian humiliation reached its worst with the Persian blasphemies committed in Jerusalem. It was then that the Church intervened in order to react to the Persian attacks, which had been directed against it. Emperor Heraclius was given strong support by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Patriarch Sergius (610-638) sacrificed a large portion of the

Church's property to finance a powerful army. Before the eyes of the silent believers, the Patriarch, with tears in his eyes, himself removed the golden repousse covers of the icons of the St Sophia Temple. The gold and jewelry provided the armament for Heraclius' soldiers who were assigned the mission of defending God himself from the Persian attacks.

All of the Empire's energy had been assembled and in the summer of 626 the war reached its peak. While Heraclius was preparing to invade Persia, Chosroes II's armies quickly crossed Asia Minor and reached the walls of Constantinople. Constantine's city resisted as if by divine miracle. The Byzantines themselves attributed that not to their strong fortifications but to the support of the Mother of God. At that moment, the war turned. The decisive defeat was inflicted on the Persians in 627 at the walls of their own capital. The eastern provinces came again under the supremacy of the power in Constantinople. To Christian Byzantium, however, the real end of the war was to come four years later when victorious Emperor Heraclius restored the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem.

## **B** The Holy War

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It was not by chance that the Byzantines considered restoring the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem the true end of the war. That was the first of a new type of war that the whole Christian world would anxiously follow: a "holy war," a war of the Cross against the "enemies of the Cross". Later historians would discover differing political, economic or strategic interests of individual countries in those wars. But that does not change the fact that the participants in those wars had always been deeply religious. The Byzantine soldier of the time was ready to risk his own life for the



True Cross rather than the grain of Syria. The total mobilization of Christian Byzantium became a fact only when in the age-long conflict with Persia, the Persians tried to control Christ.

To the medieval Christian, faith was no merely sentimental matter since he lived in a much more severe environment than we do today. Chaos and death appeared to him alike, and held out over the abyss of suffering between earthly and heavenly worlds was God's hand miraculously offering salvation. The medieval Christian was above all a warrior. He understood the faith God required from man as a "pledge of fidelity" that bound God, the commander, to man, the warrior, in the war of good against evil. In addition to faith, Christians also undertook the sacred duty of defending God's order by all means. To those people, psalms and prayers were as good weapons as spears and arrows. Military strategy was important of course, but the outcome of any battle ultimately depended on the heavenly commander's will – the true commander of the army. That is why the Christians went into action under church gonfalon<sup>s</sup>\* with the images of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and their war-songs were Christian liturgy hymns. That is why the end of a war was the moment when God's will triumphed and the holy order was restored with the True Cross returned to Jerusalem.

Unlike other wars, there were no neutral parties in a holy war because the fight between good and evil was a war of life and death. To the Christians the meaning of holy war was not limited solely to what happened on the battlefield. Its many manifestations filled the daily life of the believers: the war of the monk against the wickedness of worldly life, the war of the priest to protect the believers from sin, and, of course, the war of the Christian army against the enemies of the Cross.



## The new enemies of the Cross: the Arabs

At the same time when Byzantium triumphed in Jerusalem, in 630, on the Arabian Peninsula a member of a caravan, proclaiming himself a prophet, together with a group of followers, controlled Mecca. United by a simple but disciplined and militant new religion, the nomadic Arab tribes found a source of inspiration, faith, and religious dynamism, which for many centuries ahead was to be the most serious rival of Christianity.

Only a few years after taking Mecca, the unheard-of vigour of the Arab armies fell as a curse on the Byzantine eastern provinces. Having suffered a crushing defeat at the walls of Antioch, Emperor Heraclius had to quit that city on the sea. "Farewell, Syria!", he said once on board his ship, and his words turned to be prophetic. Syria fell under the Arabs. Shortly afterwards it was the turn of Palestine, Egypt, and Persia. Heraclius died in 641 having witnessed the total ruin of his old enemy, the Persians, but the Empire found itself at the point where it had started. Its destiny was again to be decided in the east.

There were two main reasons for the Arabs, within only seven years (634-641), conquering provinces which had belonged to the Empire for centuries. One reason was the military enthusiasm of the Arabs, their desire to spread their religion, Islam, through a holy war. The other not less important cause was the separatism\* of the conquered provinces. Long before the Arabs appeared, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt had been the scene of struggles between different heresies and the official Church, and their relationship with central power in Constantinople had been tense.

In the middle of the 7th century the Arabs ravaged Asia Minor and the horrified Christian world watched them build their own fleet. The Arabs needed a fleet



for Constantinople, the city that could not be taken by land. For four years, from 674 to 678, Constantinople lived under the rumbling of continuous Arab assaults. No strategy could drive the Arabs away. They were after the heart of the Christian Empire. The armies of Constantine IV Pogonatus (668-685) finally succeeded in repulsing the Arabs in 678, burning almost all of their fleet with the help of an ignitable composition called "Greek fire". After that abortive and consuming siege the Arabs were forced to sign a 30-year treaty of peace with Byzantium. They even had to pay taxes to the Empire, but the eastern provinces remained in their power.

At the end of the 7th century Christian Europe had no more illusions about the intentions and the power of the Arabs. Not abandoning their aspirations

towards Constantinople, at the beginning of the 8th century they also began to openly threaten western Europe. In 711, from northern Africa they crossed Gibraltar and advanced into the Iberian Peninsula, shattering the Visigothic kingdom. Meanwhile another big Arab offensive was launched in the Bosphorus. It was there that in 717, with the assistance of the Bulgarian Khan Tervel and the protection of the Virgin Mary, the Byzantine army won a sweeping victory which put an end to the Arab advance into Europe from the east. The price Byzantium had to pay for that victory was quite high. It lost control over its eastern provinces forever and they gradually became Arabic. The local population was slowly driven away from its territories. Thus at the end of the 7th century the region was to become part of the world of Islam.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. *Explain the essence of the Persian state doctrine.*
2. *What were the reasons for the conflict between Byzantium and Persia?*
3. *Why was the war called "holy war" and what was it characterized by?*
4. *Compare the two adversaries of Byzantium in the 6th and the 7th centuries. In your opinion, who represents a bigger danger for the Empire, the Persians or the Arabs?*
5. *Why did Byzantium lose its eastern provinces for good in the middle of the 7th century?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Virgin Mary as Chief commander, or the history of a song**

In 626 Constantinople was besieged by the huge army of the "fire worshipping" Persians. The emperor was away in Persia with all his armies, and the western neighbours were too far to be asked for help. It looked like it was the turn of the heart of Christianity, Constantinople, to fall prey in the holy war. There was only God left so the inhabitants of the capital

sent him their most fervent prayers, imploring a miracle and rescue from the terrible danger. So when after a fierce battle the Persians were seen to retire, nobody would believe it. They had been driven away by the small city guard and the citizens, mostly women and children. Everybody was persuaded the miracle they had been praying for had happened.



Celebrating their rescue, the people crowded in churches to thank their Saviour. It was then, during liturgy, that a peculiar song was sung for the first time, a "Cathisma" in praise of the Virgin Mary. Time has obliterated the name of the author and the location of its first performance. It was a short hymn in praise of the Mother of God and her sanctity, which was often interrupted by the Christian exclamation, "Rejoice!" The song's title is also solemn: "A hymn, during which you cannot remain seated."

In this song of thanksgiving the believers addressed the Virgin Mary with the words, "Our Lady, our champion leader..." But what could possibly associate the humble Mother of God with the fierce chief commander, the triumphant victory?

Apparently medieval man accepted all that quite naturally. In the shrine he was used to seeing an icon of the Virgin Mary, her hands held up high in prayer. On the other hand, in the Bible he read about God's elect people and its victories that lasted as long as Moses held his hands high, pointed at the sky. Whenever Moses would drop his hands, the Jews had been defeated. Therefore, the population of Constantinople had no one else to attribute the miracle of rescue to but to the praying Virgin Mary.

This is a short history of the event that turned the Mother of God into the protector of the Byzantine capital. The Cathisma in praise of the Virgin Mary spread around the world and in the 9th century it became part of the Christian church service.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# 12

## THE MILITANT FAITH: THE WORLD OF ISLAM

### **A** The Arabs and their environment

A century before they were to become the most powerful adversary to the Christian world, the Arabs represented a wide spectrum of Semitic peoples living on the Arabian Peninsula. The diverse, trying physical conditions in that huge land, one quarter of the size of Europe, caused the differences in levels of devel-

opment of the numerous Arab tribes often at war with each other.

The coastal territories—Heijaz, Yemen, and Oman—as well as the big oases had been centres of city culture even during the Roman Empire. Most of them were famous trading and seaport centres, and irrigation permitted the development of agriculture. In the interior it was quite different: the Arabian desert was populated by Bedouin nomadic tribes. Deprived of political unity, they were united by one



common language, Arabic. The Bedouins wandered across the desert in search of water and pastureland for their herds, attacking the wealthy coastal regions or the caravans crossing the desert.

In that world of extremes, religious life was also diverse. The Arabs were polytheists, believing in nature gods, demons, and spirits. They worshipped waterholes, stones, or trees, and long before Mohammed's call, Arabian paganism was showing signs of decay. But as traffic with the outside world and Christian influence increased, a need for ascetic seclusion practices developed and the first "true" believers appeared; once a year they made a pilgrimage to Mecca. There was the Kaaba, the shrine of all idols, and people from all over the Arab world journeyed there to venerate it just as the Jews worshipped the Jerusalem shrine.

## **B** Mohammed and the Islamic doctrine

Left an orphan at a very early age, Mohammed (570-632) as a youth travelled with the trading caravans. It was probably during his travels to Syria that he became familiar with the Jewish and Christian religions, which had long been known in those lands. After he married a rich widow, Mohammed settled in Mecca and began reciting the divine "Revelation" after he experienced his calling. (Doc. 1) His recitals borrowed a lot from Christian religion and Judaism. The religion he founded was called Islam, which means surrendering oneself to – absolute submission to – the will of God, or Allah. Mohammed insisted on rejecting pagan idols and recommended moral justice and generosity to the poor. His teachings attracted followers and he stirred up the local wealthy leaders' discontent, being forced to leave Mecca for Yathrib (today in Saudi Arabia).

That happened on 16 July 622 and that day, called "Hegira", or flight (emigration), was to be the beginning of the Muslim calendar: Yathrib was to change its name, becoming the "city of the Prophet", Medina. Only eight years later, Mohammed was already at the head of an army united around his teachings. With that army the prophet took Mecca in 630. Under the force of arms, the inhabitants of Mecca admitted that Mohammed was the final and greatest of Allah's prophets, and ever since then, Islam has encountered no obstacles in spreading among Arabs. Mohammed had been quite far-sighted in keeping the old cult of the Kaaba, an important source of income for Mecca. The shrine of the Kaaba was proclaimed a holy place of Islam, closely related to both Mohammed's teachings and the memory of Allah's first prophet, Abraham.

The fundamentals of Islam were similar to those of the other big monotheistic religions. The holy book of the Muslims, the Koran, conveyed the word of God as it had been revealed to Mohammed, and was collected and taken down after the Prophet's death. The Koran contains 114 suras (chapters), arranged generally in order of length, the longest coming first, the shortest last, except for the first sura, called "The Exordium" and having a special significance. The suras describe the beginning and end of the world, heaven and hell, the morals of the faithful, etc.: familiar subjects in the holy books of many big religions. What is more interesting is the role of the Koran in Islamic society. It was the crucial document of Arabic culture not only because of its content but because it propagated the Arabic tongue in a written form. The Koran defined the spiritual and social code of the faithful. In a certain sense, to the Muslim believer the Koran was not only the holy book, but the "only one".

One of the advantages of Islam was its simplicity. The five obligations of the Muslim are the confession of faith: "There is no other God but Allah", and



Mohammed is his prophet; the obligatory prayer (5 times daily); the fast in the month of Ramadan\*; charitable gifts; and the pilgrimage to Mecca. The pattern of the Islamic shrine, the mosque, was also simple. It had a large yard outside and a place of worship inside. In the yard there was always a fountain, a pool, or a well for the ritual washing of hands, feet, and face before prayer. Inside the mosque there was only one piece of furniture, the imam's chair. The furnishings consisted of carpets on which the believers knelt for prayer, facing east. The decorations on the walls featured elaborate frescoes of flora and fauna, for use of images in Islam is prohibited. Besides, believers could worship not only in the mosque. Allah could hear their prayers from anywhere.

Islam was also a practical religion, and its detailed statements about food and drink were more in compliance with the facts of climate than theology. Even today physicians would hardly recommend eating fatty pork and drinking alcoholic beverages to a person living in the hot Arabic climate.

However, the faithful Muslim had another obligation which made him particularly dangerous to the non-Muslim. That was his obligation to fight the "holy war", the jihad, which was the shortest way for him to gain a place in Islamic Paradise. When the Arab world, united by the unsophisticated but militant faith of Mohammed, resolved its internal divisions and turned to the outside world, the non-Islamic world was subjected to an unheard-of aggression, which had been intensifying for centuries under the extreme conditions of the desert.

## The Islamic empire

Only ten years after Mohammed's death, his successors had already conquered Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Per-

sia. As Mohammed left no heir, the leadership of Islam passed to Abu Bakr, a close friend of the Prophet. Abu Bakr became the first Caliph or successor to Mohammed. By the mid-7th century the caliphate\* had become quite large, which caused controversies about political ascendancy and effective governance.

The Prophet's relatives, the so-called Shiites, claimed that interpretation of the Koran was to be confined to an imam designed among Mohammed's descendants. On the other hand, the Sunnites believed that in following the tradition (the Sunna), anyone of the faithful could be chosen as leader of the community. The Sunnites got the upper hand. The Omayyad (Umayyud) caliphs were Sunnites and they ruled the caliphate for nearly a century (mid-7th to mid-8th centuries). The Muslim Empire expanded from Spain to India. Sound government and efficient administration were introduced, as well as single currency and Arabic as the official language. The capital was moved from Medina to Damascus. A dense road network was built and a cadastre\* was established to facilitate administration.

The Omayyads were overthrown in the middle of the 8th century by the Abbasid Dynasty, descended from an uncle of Mohammed. They were to rule the caliphate for nearly three centuries (mid-8th c. to mid-11th c.) until defeated by the Seljuk Turks. Abbasid rule changed the character of the Empire. The greatest flourishing of Arab civilization occurred under Harun-al-Rashid (789-809). The Abbasids moved the capital to the newly-built city of Baghdad ("the Gates of Heaven"), whose beauty and prosperity were described in the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, or The Thousand and One Nights, a collection of stories of that period written in Arabic.

Abbasid rule established a firm structure of government. At the top stood the caliph, the supreme spiritual



and secular ruler and the owner of all the lands of the caliphate. He governed with the help of viziers (ministers). That office was taken from the Persians and under the Abbasids, viziers were often converted Persians. The power of the caliph was his army which, like the Roman army, consisted of mercenaries.

## **D** The community of the faithful

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Islam did not know social hierarchies. There was no rigid division between nobility and common people. Only the descendants of the Prophet were more outstanding than the other believers but they were too few to form an aristocratic circle. Equality applied to both individual orthodox Moslems and the Moslem peoples as a whole, united into an "umma" (a unified Islamic community).

The attitude of the Islamic community toward non-Moslems was particularly interesting. The jihad was

naturally directed to pagans. However, Moslems did not consider Jews and Christians as pagans. They were considered "men of the Book" and could be drawn into office in the caliphate's administration without having the right to take military and religious ranks.

The civilization the Arab community brought was primarily urban, as the conquerors were either merchants or nomads. For that reason they did not strongly influence the rural population in the newly conquered lands, and in the beginning of the Arab expansion there was not much tension between conquerors and conquered. The situation was to change when the caliphate exhausted its possibilities for further territory expansion. The Arab administration was then forced to collect new taxes from the conquered lands and that resulted in rising discontent which was additionally aggravated by the fact that the faithful were exempted from paying taxes. In this way the full tax burden was to fall on the Christian population.

### **CHECK-UP:**

1. What was the Arabian Peninsula like at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th centuries?
2. How did the new monotheistic religion, Islam, originate and establish itself?
3. Are there similarities between the Koran and the Bible?
4. Compare the two big monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam. How did they originate, what were their fundamentals, how did they establish themselves?
5. Outline the differences between the societies within those two big religions.



## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Arab civilization; or, a bridge between ancient and modern culture**

The Koran says, "Your hearts are taken up with worldly gain from the cradle to the grave," and so observing that order caused a remarkable civilization to flourish. Arabic scholars were passionately interested in the cultural legacies of Greece and Persia. Having inherited Greek and Roman knowledge during the great expansion, the Arabs also mastered the cultural achievements of India and China. Arabic scientists enjoyed the protection and the generosity of the most powerful caliphs and made numerous scientific discoveries and contributions. Thousands of students attended classes in the universities of Baghdad and Cairo. In the big libraries Greek and Egyptian manuscripts were being translated into Arabic. Favourable conditions were created for scientific research. The fact that all the Arab world spoke one language contributed enormously to a unified Arabic scientific community. That facilitated exchanges of scientific information and ensured the prompt application of discoveries in the whole Islamic world.

From India, Arab mathematicians adopted the concept of the "zero" and the numerals we still call "arabic". They further developed the geometry of the ancient Greeks and created algebra. Eminent Arabic physicians like Avicenna (Ibn-Sina) and Averroes made complicated surgical operations because they knew the blood system in detail and were capable of avoiding big losses of blood. As a result of observations of the sun, the moon, and the stars, Arabic astronomers improved time measures; and chemists discovered the distillation of alcohol which was later to be used in making syrups and elixirs.

The unique Arabic architecture was the result of several architectural traditions merging. Arabic architects used the dome, which they borrowed from Byzantium; the vault with a metal construction, which they took from the Goths; and skillfully arranged gardens, which they took from the far East.

The decoration of buildings, places of worship, and other sacred places complied with the requirements of the Koran. Islam forbid making likenesses of the human form or face. Therefore architects developed a very sophisticated decorative style with ornaments that we still call "arabesques", consisting of foliage and other geometrical forms curiously intertwined.

The only place where human port-rayal could be seen were the manuscripts. Most of what we know today about what the Arabs were like in the Middle Ages has come through the miniatures in the Arab manuscripts. In addition to the works of the Arab scholars that were to be a source of inspiration to European science well after the Middle Ages, Arab manuscripts fostered a new type of popular literature. The main characters of the most popular collection of stories of that period, 'Arabian Nights', Aladdin, Ali Baba, Sindbad the Sailor, inspired European man throughout the medieval period.

European languages are still marked by Arabic words which indicate the special importance of Arabic study in certain areas: "zero", "cipher", "almanac", "algebra", and "alchemy" are among them. The survival of a technical vocabulary of commerce, too – "tariff", "magazine" – is a reminder of the superiority of Arab commercial technique.



## 13

## ICONOCLASM IN BYZANTIUM: 8TH TO MID-9TH CENTURY

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### **A** The mobilized empire

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In the beginning of the 8th century, after a century of exhausting wars in the East, Byzantium's might seemed gone. In the Balkans, the Bulgarian khanate had firmly asserted itself north of the Balkan Range and was not hiding its appetite for the territories in the south. In the West, the emperor's power was symbolic although the Barbarian kings and the western Christians recognized Constantinople's authority. And Constantinople itself had only been saved from Arab ravages in 717. Contemporaries associated the miraculous rescue with the Mother of God. This turning-point had really been due to the fact that the Empire had mobilized all its resources around Leo III (717-741). The new emperor was one of the many commanders of the eastern provinces who owed their promotion to top administration to personal qualities. Such people were an important source of strength to the Empire.

After containing the danger threatening Constantinople, Leo III, the tough warrior, set about giving Byzantium a new fresh energy. Extensive reforms were undertaken: military, administrative, and economic. They were all aimed at mobilizing the Byzantine state organization to resist the Arabs from the east and Bulgarian attacks from the north.

Ever since Diocletian, administra-

tive power in the provinces had been separated from military power. The needs of constant war required these two powers to be reunited. For that purpose the Empire was divided into new administrative territorial units called "themes", which consisted of several provinces under one military commander. The success of Leo III was also due to the fact that, in spite of the theme commanders' (in Greek – strategos) large powers, he managed to subordinate them to Constantinople.

After it completed the administrative reform, the Empire had more men available for the army but still had insufficient funds to maintain adequate military forces. It was then that the emperor turned to the Church.

Leo III was persuaded there was no reason why the Church should stay away from the mobilization of the whole Empire required by the necessities of war. The Church had been exempted from taxes so no revenue had been accruing in the treasury from the vast church properties. Moreover, there were many men fit for military service among the numerous monastic brotherhoods and the Byzantine army needed them badly.

### **B** The old controversy about icons

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In that same period, within the Church an old controversy about the ven-



eration of icons was gathering momentum. Early Christian art had depicted human beings very little. On catacomb walls there were mainly pictures of symbols (fish, lamb, etc.) that were quite satisfactory to the early Christians in support of their faith. After the triumph of Christianity, however, religious art had begun depicting scenes from holy history and images of the Blessed Virgin, the saints, and God Himself. It was then that disputes began whether it was right to paint icons (literally "images") of Christ. Opponents of icons maintained that if Christ was invisible, then any image of him created by a human would be incorrect. On the other hand, the iconophiles stressed the fact that Christ had lived as a human. In their opinion, if God Himself had lived as a human, then there was no harm in depicting Him as a human.

Under Leo III, iconoclasts intensified the old controversy. According to them, the veneration with which believers kissed the icons was tantamount to heresy since it smacked of pagan idol worshipping. In that same period monks were fervent adherents to icon veneration.

The conflict became all the more dramatic when imperial authority threw itself behind the iconoclasts, but we must remember that the emperors sought the monks' enormous human and material potential for the military needs of the Empire against its numerous enemies.

When in 726 Leo III ordered the icon of Christ removed from the main gate of the palace, a violent struggle between iconoclasts and iconophiles began which was to divide the Empire for the next 150 years.

## **C** Constantine V Copronymus – the state's iconoclastic policy

The real war against icons was started by Leo III's son, Constantine V

Copronymus (741-775). Like all powerful rulers, he was both passionately hated and loved by his contemporaries. Constantine V was a brilliant commander, administrator, and theologian. His main policy was to bring the Church under the authority of the emperor. In 754, with his active participation, a special council of bishops was convened which forbade the use of images in public worship.

After that, the Church had no more illusions about the emperor's intentions. Constantine V turned the abstract theological arguments into a sword against the monks. Many of the monasteries in Constantinople were turned into barracks. Monks were forced to cast off the cassock and walk across the hippodrome along with women, made a laughingstock of the crowds. Many of the military commanders repeated the events in Constantinople in their themes.

No matter how debatable Constantine V's theological arguments and measures might have been, he must have constantly had heavenly support. Following his initial triumph against the Arabs, his armies took the offensive. Soon imperial power was restored in large parts of Armenia and Syria. Documents from that period mention that Constantine V's defeat of the Arabs had been the cause for their moving their capital to the east, from Damascus to Baghdad.

Having neutralized the Arab danger, Constantine V directed his mighty armies against the Bulgarian khanate. At that time, the khanate had been devoting its attention to solving of important internal power issues. The ruling Doulo dynasty had been removed from power. The throne was violently disputed between two powerful families, the Vokils and the Ougains. In less than 20 years (754-768), there was a succession of six rulers on the Bulgarian throne. During the same period, Constantine V conducted nine campaigns against the Bulgarians. The greatest campaign by sea and by land in 763 was



headed by the Emperor himself. Near Anchialo the Bulgarian troops sustained a severe defeat that shook the khanate. Never before had Byzantium been so close to achieving its goal: destruction of the Bulgarian khanate and restoration of its power in the Balkans. It was only the sudden death of Emperor Constantine V that saved the Bulgarians. During the crisis that followed, the Bulgarian khans realized that current Slav-Bulgarians relations ensured neither the khanate's nor the khanate army's unity.

Despite the mixed feelings Constantine V, conqueror and heretic, left in Byzantium, the period of triumphant victories against the Bulgarians would remain forever associated with him. All subsequent emperors forced to retreat before Bulgarian pressure would awaken the memories of his example.

## **D** The 787 Nicene Council

The successors of Constantine V were only remote images of their glorious predecessor. They continued the iconoclast policy but had no victories to their credit. The terrifying Arab cavalry took again the offensive. The Church, on the other hand, began responding to the attacks of the imperial court. They got their opportunity in 787 when the Church Council, meeting in Nicaea, condemned iconoclasm and restored icon veneration. A process of restoration of the devastated monasteries began.

Iconoclasm, however, had too many adherents in military and administrative circles throughout the Empire where there was a public show of honour towards the rule of Constantine V. Therefore, all the disasters that had befallen Byzantium at the beginning of the 9th century, particularly the successes of the Bulgarians who had advanced to the capital's gates, were attributed to the iconophiles.

In 815, in order to prevent "idol lovers" from kissing the icons, the Byzantine emperor ordered them placed above man's height in churches. In response, the Father Superior of the biggest monastery in Constantinople, Theodore Studit, organized a Palm Sunday procession with icons in the streets. This caused new fierce persecutions in which many monks died and dozens of bishops were sent into exile. The persecutions lasted for several decades, up to the rule of Leo V's successors.

In the beginning of 843 the persecutions stopped. On 11 March 843, the first Sunday of Lent, during liturgy in the St Sophia Temple, the cult of icons was officially restored. To this day the first Sunday of Lent is celebrated by the eastern Church as an Orthodox victory over the last of the greatest Christian heresies. By tradition, the solemn mass was attended by the orthodox ruler as a manifestation of his submission to the Church.

## **E** The separation of the West

The century Byzantium spent overcoming the iconoclast crisis had opened an abyss between Rome and Constantinople. The emperor's embrace of iconoclasm had been strongly opposed by the Pope and Emperor Leo III was even pronounced heretic. In response to such defiance, the Emperor annexed from the Papal diocese\* regions in south Italy and the western Balkan Peninsula, donating them to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Among other things, it was also a heavy, badly timed financial blow for Rome. Italy was being terrorized by the belligerent Langobard kingdom in the north. The situation was quite critical and the Pope asked the Franks for help.

In 732 the Franks stopped the further advance of the Arabs into Western Europe. Charles Martel's (715–741) defeat of the Arabs in the battle of Poitiers



(today in France) brought them the reputation of saviours of the Christian west; it gave undeniable proof of their military power. That was why the Pope supported Pepin the Short (741-768), the leader of the Frankish troops, when he asked him, "Who should rule the Frankish kingdom, those who hold the whole power or those who do not have any power at all?". By coincidence, when Rome needed military help from the Franks, the man who controlled their military power, Pepin the Short, needed the Pope's blessing for the royal crown of the Merovingians.

The reason why Pepin the Short approached the Pope was his belief that only the Roman Church could guarantee the divine legitimacy of political power. Such a belief was based on a document, worked out in the Pope's chancery, called the "Donation of Constantine". According to that document, Constantine the Great had left all the power to old Rome and the papacy. That was why most western Barbarian kings had been so insistent in obtaining by all means the pope's recognition. Pepin the Short was not unlike the others. In 754 he

seized the region around Rome from the Langobards and granted it to the Pope. Pepin's generous grant of territory set the beginning of the papal state in Italy of which Vatican City remains to this day.

In this way, in the mid-8th century the Roman Church's authority was lastingly linked to the Franks' and the Germans' worlds. Pepin was elevated to the throne and anointed\* first king of the Franks. With the help of the Frankish army, popes managed to spread Christianity through most of western Europe. These were big gains for the papacy and gave it grounds to claim its primacy over eastern patriarchs. Gradually a concept developed that the pope in Rome had special legal rights over the Universal Church which had been conferred on him by Apostle Peter. In the west the idea was born that Christians would not gain salvation unless it specifically related to the Roman Church and the Pope. In subsequent centuries that doctrine would cause direct confrontation with Constantinople. It would also be the beginning of the separation of the western Christian world from eastern Orthodoxy.

### **CHECK-UP:**

- 1. Describe the military and administrative changes under the reign of Emperor Leo III.*
- 2. Give the reasons why emperors supported iconoclasm?*
- 3. Who were the main enemies of the Empire? Trace the military campaigns conducted by Constantine V Copronymus.*
- 4. Why did iconoclasm continue even after it was condemned as heresy?*
- 5. Why did Pepin the Short seek benediction from the Pope in his aspiration to the crown?*



## FACES OF HISTORY:

### The world of the icon

In history few other portraits have aroused such heated controversy as icons. At first sight it seems strange that these disproportionate depictions featuring too big faces, large watchful eyes, thin lips, and a deathly pallor should be worth discussion. Besides, despite certain slight differences in colour and lines, they are so alike that we could hardly be speaking of any creative individuality of the artists who painted them. Nevertheless, medieval people argued passionately and even fought to prove whether it was right or wrong to paint and venerate icons. Obviously they must have had their strong reasons – which today are invisible to us – when looking at the icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints.

Unlike modern man who considers the icon as a piece of art, medieval man regarded the icon as a window to the world beyond, the perfect world. If man today is above all a viewer who assesses chiefly formal and visible qualities, medieval man was a believer who interpreted meaning – the invisible power which miraculously protected the cruel world from disintegrating. The true man was the man of faith in the Middle Ages. Medieval man saw depicted in the icon the most important miracle of his faith: God in human form (Christ) or the holiness of human beings (Virgin Mary, saints). To him, the icon emanated in a special way the blessing of salvation, so he actually worshipped not the painted piece of wood itself, as the iconoclasts accused people of doing, but the prototype, God.

Icons helped believers concentrate their full attention on the subject of their prayers. Icons did not simply depict holy images: above all, they taught Christians faith and morality. Frequently the child Jesus

was depicted with the face of an adult. Thus in only one image it concentrated the whole Christian ideal about man: of being innocent as a child and wise as an old man. All medieval works of art, icons in particular, conveyed the Christian interpretation of reality. One could clearly identify good and evil in icons. Their basic purpose was to teach the believers to unquestionably distinguish between the main virtues and vices. In the name of that goal medieval artists sacrificed the diversity of forms. In time the Church would elaborate strict rules (canons) concerning the topics that were to be painted on icons. For example, for centuries the most frequently painted theme was St George slaying the dragon. That subject always contained the same elements. The biggest figure in the icon used to be the saint himself who, despite the dramatic context, was always depicted with a calm, lit up face, looking straight at the believer. The saint stood high up in that composition and often his horse was painted disproportionately small. In the bottom was the dragon, pierced by St George's spear. The dragon was often painted black and was always extremely hideous.

The painting of icons was usually assigned to monks. Iconographers were not simple artists. They were true evangelists as through their art they translated the basic principles of Christian teaching. Those who best read the canon and observed it closely were considered the most talented. That is why the images in the icons were always alike, devoid of any details that might distract the believer or distort the Christian meaning conveyed through the image.



## WORKSHOP:

### The birth of medieval civilization

**Task No.1** Self-test your knowledge. Choose the level of knowledge you wish to test yourself on:

#### Satisfactory

1. List the names of all the Bulgarian khans and Frankish rulers you know.
2. What event is associated with the following years: 500 681 732
3. Describe the Muslim shrine, the mosque, taking into account its architecture, furnishings, and decoration.

*(If you have found it difficult to answer the questions above, please revise the last five lessons. There is still chance for you not to get a poor mark for the first term.)*

#### Good

1. Who were they?  
Tangra  
Mohammed  
Leo III
2. What event is associated with the following years: 622 632 787
3. Explain the essence of Islam, taking into account (i) the time and environment in which it appeared; (ii) its concept of the world; (iii) the Muslim Scriptures – the Koran; and (iv) the obligations and prohibitions of the Faithful.

*(Your correct answers to the questions above show you have achieved good knowledge in the world two most widely spread religions: Christianity and Islam. There is not much time left till the end of the first term and you can do better. You can still get more than a 4.)*

#### Excellent

1. Who were they?  
Abu Bakr  
Constantine V Copronymus  
Boethius
2. Which of the events listed below was Charles Martel (715-741) a contemporary to?  
a. The help Khan Tervel rendered to Constantinople, besieged by the Arabs;  
b. The beginning of the struggle between iconophiles and iconoclasts;  
c. Mohammed's sermons;  
d. The battle of Poitiers.
3. Describe the features of the state in the Early Middle Ages, using your knowledge on the Frankish kingdom and the Bulgarian khanate.

*(Great! You have answered the most difficult questions. Don't put your history book away, though. There is still time left till the end of the term and there is more to learn.)*

**Task No.2:** Compose an itinerary of time

In parallel lines follow the development throughout the beginning of the 6th to the middle of the 7th centuries of: the Arab Caliphate, the Byzantine Empire, the Bulgarian Khanate, the Frankish kingdom. Leave 1 cm between each decade.

**Task No.3:** Give a written answer to the following question:

What was the world like outside of the Byzantine Empire in the period between the 6th and the 8th centuries?



You could follow the following plan in your answer:

- the society of the Franks;

- the society of the Slavs;

- the society of the Bulgarians;

- the society of the Arabs.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# 14

### THE CAROLINGIAN EMPIRE: UNIFICATION OF THE GERMAN WORLD

#### **A** Charles, the sword of Christ

In the middle of the 8th century, the anointment of Pepin the Short as King of the Franks brought the Carolingian dynasty onto the stage of history. Unlike the last Merovingians, known as the “feeble kings”, the Carolingians turned to be energetic rulers and were generally brilliant warriors. The greatest of the Carolingians was Charles the Great (Charlemagne) (768-814) who began his reign in peace time, until the pope appealed for help against the Lombards. Charlemagne then organized the first of 53 campaigns during his reign, most of which he conducted himself.

Charlemagne's campaigns ended with remarkable results. To the south Frankish power was firmly established on the lands of the Lombards (today's north Italy). In the west, in northern Spain he instituted the Spanish Mark, populated with Christians: Basques and Navarrians. For thirty years he fought wars in the north-east against the Saxons (now northwest Germany). Despite Charlemagne's military

supremacy, the Saxons obstinately rejected his imposing Christianity on them often revolting to restore their own gods. In order to intimidate and suppress them, Charles had to use violence, for example executing 4,500 rebellious Saxons. After the submission of the Saxons, Bavaria was added to the Frankish kingdom. Thus the unification of the Germanic tribes was completed. In this respect Charles the Great has remained unsurpassed in history because he politically united a world extending from northern Spain to the Elbe River and from the Atlantic Ocean to northern Italy.

The tough Germanic warriors, who in the 8th century had been practically the masters of all the European West, were defeated not only by the formidable power of the Frankish armoured cavalry. The Frankish sword destroyed with no less vigour the pagan shrines of the ancient Germanic gods. The warrior's world could be conquered only by a stronger adversary, namely Christianity. The conversion of the Germanics by “fire and sword” added a peculiarly harsh sensitivity to the whole medieval West.

In the beginning of the 9th century, having already united the Germanic peoples under his authority,



Charlemagne challenged the pagan western Slavs, who occupied vast territories between the Central Danube and the Baltic Sea. Christianity, introduced to the Slavs on the spears of the Germanic tribes, was strongly resisted. This caused one of the greatest conflicts in European history. The confrontation between Germans and Slavs would go beyond the epoch which originated it, extending to modern times.

## **B** The foundation of an empire: the signs of revival

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In the beginning of the 9th century the aspirations of the two important powers in the western Christian world found an intersection point. The powerful Carolingians wanted their authority to be sanctified by the Roman Church, while the Pope wanted to break away from the emperors in Constantinople, to whom he was still officially subordinated. That led to Charlemagne's solemn coronation by the pope in 800. He was crowned emperor and given the title "Emperor of the Roman Empire" in the West (*Romanorum gubernans imperium*). Each party to that ceremony interpreted the meaning of Charlemagne's acclamation as emperor in its own way. The only unquestionable fact about it was that after four centuries of political chaos, the western world was again unified. To properly manage the vast Frankish Empire, a unified administration system was established. The territory was divided into counties (about 700). In every county religious matters were directed by an archbishop or a bishop, while secular authority was carried out by a count\*, appointed by the king. Special royal messengers, bishops, or counts were

responsible for dispatching imperial laws from the capital Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) to all parts of the Empire and controlling local counts, clergy, and administration.

All representatives of the Empire's administrative apparatus were bound to the emperor by a personal oath of allegiance. Supreme power belonged to the emperor and in spite of the Roman titles, imperial power was linked to the emperor's personal authority; therefore, every time that authority was jeopardized or weakened, the basis of power was shaken. The emperors' assistants in the central government were the Count Palatine (the first minister), the Chancellor (head of the chancery), the Chamberlain (Treasurer), and the Constable (the commander-in-chief of the Frankish cavalry).

## **C** Carolingian Renaissance

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Charlemagne's Empire incorporated over 14 ethnic groups who differed in culture and ways of life. Language differences made contacts between them difficult, too. The attempts of the Carolingians to solve that problem and create an adequate literate administration for the Empire has been called "the Carolingian Renaissance" by modern scholars.

This "renaissance" differed drastically from the later European cultural renaissance of the 15th century. But it described an important novelty: the revival of learning, completely forgotten by the Barbarian community which had been quite satisfied with its primitive religious notions and direct experience of life.

Charlemagne brought to the court educated people from all over the realm who restored the tradition of reading and writing in Latin. By



his order old Latin manuscripts were copied and diffused. Thus was born a refined and reformed manuscript which became one of the greatest cultural instruments in the West in the 15th century. Most of the things we know about Roman literature and culture, we owe to the numerous copied texts of Roman authors made at the time of Charlemagne.

The number of monastery and church schools increased steadily. In the capital (Aix-la-Chapelle, or Aachen) itself, under the direction of Alcuin, a group of men of letters created the Palatine School, which became a centre for development and training of clergymen for the imperial cathedral. Alcuin, a good teacher and librarian from York (today in England), was inspired by the Roman educational system. He taught at the Palatine School the seven liberal arts, the trivium and the quadrivium. Charlemagne himself was his pupil: he read with difficulty and could hardly write.

Literary works created at the time of the Carolingian Renaissance lacked the elegance and refinement of old Roman literature. Yet they showed the craving for learning and their creation stimulated the development of the Frankish language.

The other arts of that period showed the same tendencies. When Charlemagne visited the Byzantine shrine "San Vitale", in Ravenna, he was so inspired that he wished to build a similar one. For that purpose he "imported" from the East both the necessary materials and the master-builders because the Barbarian world had forgotten the old mosaics and refined stonework techniques. The result was the cathedral in Aix-la-Chapelle, which could not really match the refinement and elegance of San Vitale but far exceeded all the western Barbarians had been capable of to that time.

## **D** Disintegration of the Empire, or the birth of the Germanic-Slav conflict

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The order maintained by Charlemagne's military genius and exceptional energy collapsed after his death. Relations with Byzantium were tense, while those with the pope in Rome remained undetermined. The confusion created a dispute about who had supremacy in power: whether the pope was responsible for the salvation of souls, or the emperor who, inspired by God, ruled all the territories, including those of the pope. Western society devoted three long centuries to solving that question. The foundations of the modern western world were to a great extent laid in that very struggle between religious and secular power.

Constant military and administrative coercion had not been able to fully wipe out the differences in traditions between the different peoples in the Carolingian empire. That is why when Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious (810-840) succeeded him, he divided the Empire between his sons, forced by circumstances. The Treaty of Verdun of 843 created three kingdoms, one covering the western side of the Rhine valley, the Western Frankish kingdom (today modern France), under Charles the Bald. To the east of the Rhine valley, the Eastern Frankish kingdom (today modern Germany) went to Louis the German; and the Lotharingia kingdom, including the lands of modern Italy, went to Lothar.

Charlemagne's spirit uniquely influenced his successors and the entire medieval period of the Germanic world. A concept developed that conversion to Christianity could also be forced, carried out by the Germanic sword. That concept infused the specific spirit of future Roman empires which, along with the title, inherited above



all the philosophy that in the name of faith one should fight hard and unsentimentally: pagans should be conquered and submit to the name of Christ. That philosophy explained why the centre of activities in the Germanic world in the middle of the 9th century moved further east. The Eastern Frankish kingdom (Germany) became the forefront of advancing Christianity. In the East there were the lands of their old enemy, the pagan Slavs, which had to be conquered.

However, as early as the beginning of the 9th century, an active political and cultural center of the western Slavs had emerged: the principality of Great Moravia, situated in part of modern Slovakia and Hungary. In 846 Prince Rostislav had converted to Christianity and he then faced the problem of how to neutralize Germanic pressure.

A conflict took shape which was to become extremely important for the whole Christian world. Christendom awoke in the Slavs of Central Europe an

unexpected cultural energy which was unfortunately directed against foreign pressure. Having reached them late and through their old enemy, to the Slavs in those regions Christianity would long reflect an old conflict. The vigour of the Germanic sword would for a long time be distinguishable through the sermons of the Germanic missionaries, who began massive conversions in Great Moravia. The only possible rescue was the establishment of an independent church. Rostislav did not hesitate to approach the two biggest Christian churches at the time: in Rome and in Constantinople. The rivalry between those two spiritual centres for supremacy over the Slav world only deepened the already existing contradictions between them.

Ultimately, a cultural Slavdom in Europe was established. Christianity also became a means of guaranteeing the Slavs political independence and preserving their ethnic autonomy on the continent.

### **CHECK-UP:**

- 1. What was the main goal of Charlemagne's policy?*
- 2. What did the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor result in?*
- 3. What imposed the revival, if only in part, of the ancient educational system at the time of the Carolingians?*
- 4. Describe the reasons that caused the German-Slav conflict in the 9th century.*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **Charlemagne's imperial title, or the history of a recognition**

According to Einhard, a layman and Charlemagne's personal secretary, the ruler of the Franks had not been aware of Pope Leo III's (795-816) intentions to crown him emperor. That is why when on Christmas Day, 800, the pope crowned him and acclaimed him as emperor, Charlemagne was very surprised. But aside from that unconvincing story, what

is remarkable is Charlemagne's enormous diplomatic activity during the following decade, obtaining recognition for his new position as "Roman emperor" from the other great rulers of the time. The Arab Caliph, Haroun-al-Rashid, is reported to have gladly recognized him as requested, but it was not so with the other rulers.



At that time there were three powerful states in Europe: the Frankish, the Bulgarian, and the Byzantine. Each of them was struggling to impose itself on the political scene of the continent. Charlemagne's coronation had been extremely painful to the emperors in Constantinople, who considered themselves the legatees of ancient Rome and regarded the pretensions of Charlemagne, a man who could hardly write, as usurping their lawful rights. Even the strong argument Charlemagne had made—that in 800 the throne in the “New Rome”, was vacant because it was occupied by a woman—did not bring him

the recognition that he was equal to the emperors in Constantinople. For twelve years Charlemagne and the Pope would not stop their diplomatic manoeuvres to obtain that recognition. The recognition finally came unexpectedly in 812 and it was due neither to Charlemagne nor the Pope's efforts. It happened simply because the Bulgarian Khan, Kroum, was preparing to lay siege to Constantinople one year after he had killed the Byzantine emperor, Nicephorus, in battle. Constantinople quickly recognized Charlemagne's imperial title in the hope that, in return, his troops would come to its rescue against the Bulgarians.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# 15

### THE BULGARIAN KHANATE: UNIFICATION OF THE SLAVS (FIRST HALF OF THE 9TH CENTURY)

#### **A** A long-suffered centralization

About the time Charles the Great (Charlemagne) was establishing himself in Western Europe, the Bulgarian Khanate in the East completed its political doctrine.

Unlike the Franks, to achieve their end the Bulgarians continually confronted an enemy that excelled them in organization and that had been a decisive factor in European politics long before them. That enemy was Byzantium. In the middle of the 8th century, under Constantine V Copronymus, Byzantine pressure threat-

ened the very existence of the khanate. At the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 9th centuries, it became obvious that the unity and internal stability of the Bulgarian state required a new political centralization. They also felt a need for raw materials, territories, and human resources to support their ambitions to impose their will on southeastern Europe.

It was all included in the Bulgarian foreign policy of the beginning of the 9th century. The khanate's geopolitical location itself determined the main directions of its territorial expansion. Its desire to establish control over the “steppe corridor” in Europe (the territories extending



between the Danube river and the Carpathian Mountains) dated back to the end of the 7th century when the khanate had firmly established itself north of the Danube. After adding the lands south of the Danube, the khanate sought to expand south and southwest toward the territories of its major rival, Byzantium.

To fulfill such an ambitious programme, the Bulgarians had to conquer the Slavs and unite them under the Bulgarian khan's power. In the 9th century no one misinterpreted the importance of that large ethnic group in Europe's life. At that time the Slavs accounted for almost one third of the continent's population and inhabited vast territories extending between the Baltic Sea, the Aegean Sea and central Danube. It was obvious that whoever managed to subordinate them under his power could impose himself on European politics.

## **B** Khan Kroum's wars

The foreign policy under Khan Kroum (803–814) embodied the Bulgarian political doctrine. A series of military operations were undertaken. The first blow of the Bulgarians in 805 completed the destruction of the Avar kaganate already started by Charles the Great. As a result, Bulgarian power extended over the steppe corridor between the Danube and the Carpathians up to the Tisza River (in today's Hungary). In addition to the lands of the Avars in Pannonia, the Khanate also annexed Transylvania (in today's Romania), a region full of silver and salt deposits, the so-called "white gold of the Middle Ages". In this way, achieving success in his foreign policy, Khan Kroum also acquired the economic power the khanate needed to expand.

Immediately after its victories in the northwest, the Bulgarian army advanced to the Balkans, Thrace, and Macedonia. During that restless, tense period in the rela-

tionship between Byzantium and Bulgaria, the initiative was more often in the hands of the Bulgarian Khan.

In 809 Khan Kroum seized the Empire's strategic fortress, Serdica (today's Sofia), and the surrounding region. The existing tension flamed up, the Empire conducting a two-year retaliatory campaign against the Bulgarians. The main blow was directed against the heart of the Khanate, Pliska. Emperor Nicephorus Gennicus (802–811) himself stood at the head of the Byzantine army. Having devastated Pliska, the Emperor considered his mission accomplished and he victoriously set off on his return journey. On 26 July 811, in a fierce battle in the Varbishi Pass in the Balkan Range, the Byzantine army sustained one of their heaviest defeats ever. Nicephorus I himself was killed. The Bulgarians not only swept to a brilliant victory but finally dispelled the illusion that the Bulgarian problem could be settled by force.

Constantinople was taken aback by the Emperor's death and for some time, the Bulgarian counteroffensive southward encountered no important barriers. As a result of the occupation of vast territories in Thrace and the Sofia region and the seizure of a number of towns on the Black Sea coast (Messembria, Develt and others), a large proportion of the Slavs settled on the Balkan Peninsula were incorporated in the Khanate. In order to obtain recognition for his achievements, in 813 Khan Kroum launched a campaign against Constantinople. The Empire officially recognized Kroum's victories and his right to possess the newly annexed territories extending from Thrace to Pannonia. The decisiveness with which Kroum prepared to siege the impregnable city and his success in reaching its walls clearly showed the importance of such recognition. That recognition was finally obtained after his death in 815, by his son, Omourtag.



## **C** The achievements of Kroum's successors

In the struggle for obtaining power, diplomatic recognition of military successes was extremely important. In 815 Khan Omourtag (814-831) signed a peace treaty with Byzantium to ensure the official diplomatic recognition of his father's achievements. As a guarantee for the observance of that treaty, the Bulgarian Khan and the Byzantine Emperor exchanged oaths pledging to respect the agreement. To the Bulgarians the ceremony meant that both rulers were equally important as reflected in the strength of their armies.

Bulgarian power in the newly annexed territories needed consolidating. Already Khan Kroum had begun massive evacuations of the Byzantine population from Thrace to the lands north of the Danube. Khan Omourtag continued the same policy and evacuated the most rebellious Slavs in different parts of the Khanate. Such measures were aimed at demographically ensuring the Khanate's acquisitions in the southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula.

The succession of Khan Kroum and Khan Omourtag's policies was the best evidence of the Bulgarian state doctrine. In the 9th century that doctrine was to be inherited along with the khan's power.

There was also continuity with respect to the other objective of the Bulgarian foreign policy, the control over the territories north and northeast of the Danube. During Omourtag's reign the Slav tribes beyond the Timok River (Branichevtsi, Abodriti) attempted to break away from the Bulgarian khan's power. They sent envoys to the Frankish emperor requesting him to accept them as his subjects. All the efforts at finding a diplomatic solution of the problem were unsuccessful.

Omourtag's military operations at the end of the 820s forced the rebellious Slavs to submit to Bulgarian authority. Once again the Bulgarians had shown no hesitation in their desire to have a say in Central Europe.

The policy of incorporating Slavs of the Balkan Peninsula in the Bulgarian khanate continued under Omourtag's successors. After a number of successful military actions Khan Malamir (831-836) and Khan Presiyan (836-852) incorporated into Bulgaria vast regions of Macedonia and Thrace. The southern Bulgarian border reached the estuary of the Struma (Greek – Strymon) River.

In this way, by the middle of the 9th century Bulgaria's main foreign objectives had been reached: it had firm control over the steppe region of Europe (between the Danube and the Carpathians up to Pannonia) and a stable frontier in the Balkans, recognized by Byzantium and including most of the lands populated with Slavs. Important efforts were made to organize the huge state so that the united centre of power would control equally well all of its heterogeneous lands and subjects.

## **D** From a khanate to a medieval state

There was an important barrier to the policy of the Bulgarian khans of the ninth century. At the time, Bulgarian society consisted of two major ethnic groups. Slavs and Bulgarians continued to live apart, inhabiting different regions, setting up their own settlements and observing their own religious cults. That was a source of considerable problems. The independence of the different groups of subjects hampered the proper administration of the vast khanate that extended from the Carpathians to Thrace and Macedonia.



One of the causes for this separatism had already been eliminated under Khan Kroum. Old tribal customs had been replaced with common laws applying equally to everybody. Conditions had been created for the tribal Slav and Bulgarian communities to turn into a society of the khan's subjects. Enforcing a law, however, was not enough to complete the process. That was achieved by Khan Kroum's successors who set up a new administrative structure of the Khanate.

The peace with Byzantium during that period secured a favourable climate for performing the complicated administrative change. The Khanate's territory was divided into military administrative provinces: komitats and zhupas. Gradually the Khanate began to be governed on administrative and political principles. The repartition of the Khanate's territories eliminated the Slav chieftains' dangerous autonomy.

Already under Khan Omourtag, to prevent any possibility of local tribal chiefs acting in violation of the ruler's will, local administration had been assigned to close associates of the khan. The governors of the new provinces became representatives of the Bulgarian nobility and were called boils and bagains. Those highest placed in the administrative hierarchy were the khan's direct assistants, the kavkhan\* and the ichergouboil\*, who were vested with big diplomatic and military power.

The governors of the military and administrative provinces were appointed from both the Slavic and the Bulgarian nobility. In fact, despite debates whether the Slavs had to first accept Bulgarian customs before being granted access to power, there is no doubt that the merger of Slav and Bulgarian cultures largely began with the administration of the Khanate. At that level, assembled in the service of one ruler, contacts between people of dif-

ferent ethnic origins were made. Irrespective of their positions, above them all stood the khan, his power practically unlimited and unshared.

The difficult administrative reform was focused on one major goal: helping the khan direct the khanate's enormous demographic and political potential towards achieving the targets of the Bulgarian state doctrine.

The general spirit of centralization governing the Bulgarian society in the middle of the 9th century was reflected in the Bulgarian architecture of the period. From a fortified camp, Pliska was gradually turned into a capital city. After its restoration in 811, the traditional moat and embankment were reinforced. An internal fortified stone wall was built in the beginning of the 9th century. Inside the fortification was the center of state power: the khan's palace, the Throne Chamber, temples, and residences of the nobility. At the beginning of the 9th century Pliska had also become a trade centre, with a market place and workshops for working clay and metals. Soon fortified settlements, with similar planning and techniques as those used in the building of Pliska, were set up throughout the Bulgarian lands.

It was no accident that Greek was chosen as the official language of the renovated Bulgarian khanate of the 9th century. Inscriptions on stone columns of the period, written in the international language of that part of Europe, marked important events or the khan's will on particular occasions. In this way the intention of the Bulgarian khan to rule over those lands in the future was expressed. That intention, however, was bound to end in a clash of interests with Byzantium. Under Khan Omourtag Christianity, the most powerful symbol of the Byzantine Empire, was subject to cruel persecution within the Bulgarian khanate. Christianity had already



spread throughout the country and was causing problems. Even the heir to the throne, Enravota, turned out to be a follower of Christianity. In the name of Bulgarian interests Khan Omourtag deprived his first-born son of the right to inherit the throne. Moreover, the apostate was later killed by Khan Malamir, which caused the Church canonize him as a Christian martyr.

Time would gradually eliminate the religious differences between Bulgaria and Byzantium, but the tension between the two states, contending for supremacy in Europe, continually defined their relations. When later, Bulgarians and Byzantines were to be linked by the principles of Orthodoxy, their rivalry would find other manifestations.

## CHECK-UP

- 1. In which directions was the foreign policy of the Bulgarian state oriented?*
- 2. Describe Khan Kroum's military successes.*
- 3. Is it true that in the middle of the 9th century Bulgaria achieved its foreign policy goals?*
- 4. What was the structure of the centralized state under the rulers of the Kroum dynasty?*

## FACES OF HISTORY:

### The Madara Horseman

The only rock relief in Europe is located in Bulgaria, near the village of Madara (Shumen district). It is 23 meters high, cut into one of the rocks of the Madara plateau. Time has destroyed most of the details of this work. And yet one can still see a stately horseman, followed by a dog, piercing a lion. Those three figures used to be the most preferred images of the steppe peoples from China to Central Europe. They expressed the most important things in nomadic society: loyalty (the dog), valiance (the spear), victory over the enemy (the pierced lion), a triumphant ruler (the horseman), and the support of Tangra, whose symbol was the horse. That explains why the rock relief horseman enjoyed such veneration. A whole complex of shrines to Tangra, the great god of the steppe peoples, had been built around it. According to archeologists, throughout

the 8th and possibly in the beginning of the 9th centuries, the cult complex near Madara must have been a religious centre of the Bulgarian khanate.

There has been much debate about which of the Bulgarian khans was depicted on the rock relief. The prevailing opinion is that the relief was not dedicated to a specific khan but to the khan's glory in general. It is probably for that reason that at the bottom of the relief, different inscriptions have been incised into the rock, marking important events in the history of the Bulgarians under different khans (Tervel, Kormisosh, Omurtag).

The fact that the monument had been surrounded by shrines to Tangra is no accident. The Bulgars believed their "glorious khan" was a "ruler sent by God". Nobody questioned the link between



the two most elevated authorities in the life of the Bulgarian community – Tangra and the khan. It was from Tangra himself that the khan received his supernatural power, the “orenda” that none of the other Bulgarians owned. For that reason that the khan’s power was sacred and unlimited, and remained so until Tangra himself deprived him from that power.

Many things, particularly the power of Bulgarian arms, depended on Tangra’s will. The Bulgars believed that they could win only with the support of Tangra. That is why before each battle they would hold special ceremonies to ensure that support. For instance, when the Bulgarians were at the gates of Constantinople, Khan Kroum offered as sacrifice “a lot of livestock”, then sprinkled his soldiers with water from of his helmet; thus “sanctified”, they were ordered to surround the walls of city in order to make

a “magic circle” and show Tangra where his help was needed most.

The special link between the khan and Tangra was so important that sometimes it was the reason for his dethronement. For example, some natural calamities, military defeats, or even some physical weakness of the khan were sometimes interpreted as a proof that Tangra had stopped his support for the khan. He was then deposed and ritually killed, and in his place another khan was hailed who was believed to have received the special khan orenda.

During Kroum’s dynasty, succession had already become hereditary, but the belief about the divine origin of power remained. What is more, whoever participated in managing the khanate had to share that belief and take part in the thanksgiving rituals to Tangra, from where the khan derived his sacred power.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# 16

### THE WORLD THAT WOULD NOT CHANGE: BYZANTINE CIVILIZATION (MID-9TH – MID-11TH CENTURIES)

#### **A** Constantinople in the middle of the 9th century: “The Bishop’s Hand-book”

In the mid-9th century, having survived the disasters of Arab attacks and iconoclast struggles, the Byzantine capital

was experiencing a new period of achievement. Surviving from that period is the Constantinople governor’s hand-book, known as the “Bishop’s Hand-book.” The obligations described there clearly show that the bishop governed a city in which industries and commerce were prospering. The craftsmen were



united in corporations\* in order to fill big state orders for arms and supplies for the army. Supplying luxuries and valuable vessels for the palace also required the strict regulation of many diverse economic activities. All production in the capital was directly controlled by the state, whose official representative was the bishop. He was responsible for the stocks of raw materials, payment of duties by foreign merchants, and prices on the markets and in the corporations. The bishop was supposed to sustain order. It was as if the Byzantines were trying to forget the chaos of the iconoclast period. During the next century the desire for order in city government gradually spread to almost all the other cities of the empire. Historical research shows that city administration in Byzantium was organized to the minutest detail.

There was a new spirit reigning in the civic centres which controlled all details of everyday life. This spirit of order became the basis of Byzantium's magnificent image throughout the centuries.

## **B** The mid-9th century world: the lessons from iconoclasm

The recent past could not be forgotten that easily. The many attempts of emperors to define the faith in a way acceptable to all the Empire had finally met with success. But during the long quest for religious unity the Empire had lost all its subjects holding other religious views. Its boundaries had shrunk within the lands of ancient Greek culture: the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor, and south Italy. Its size made Byzantium commensurate with her strong adversaries, the Arab Caliphate, the Frankish Empire, and the Bulgarian Khanate. And they were ready to contest the Empire's claim to rule the world.

New conditions required new policies. The main goal of the emperors in Constantinople was to allow no new religious riots. Iconoclasm had again shown that religious ardour could easily become political, and that had been a bitter experience. Therefore, all the emperors' energy from then on would be devoted to preserving the restored religious unity. Orthodoxy would remain their most important cultural criterion and order would be their political ideal. The era of revival was over.

## **C** "The humble emperor": the world of ceremony

In the second half of the 9th century there were interesting changes in the way artists depicted the Byzantine emperor. In the narthex of the St Sophia Temple and in many other churches of that time one could often see mosaics or frescoes depicting "The Emperor before Christ". Every believer stepping into the shrine would see a humble emperor, hands clasped in prayer, kneeling before Christ. It was not by chance that after the feast of Orthodoxy in 843, images of the emperors no longer showed their victories but their piety. With the help of art, the emperor's changed attitude to the church had been imprinted for everyone "see"; that ended the emperors' struggle for supremacy over the Church.

For centuries the Church had resisted the emperors every time they had tried to solve matters of faith by force. At the end of the 9th century, however, the Church opened its doors to the images of humble emperors. These were displayed next to those of Christ but were in the narthex, and believers venerated them just as they worshipped all the saints. The "humble" emperor, his head bowed to receive the crown, obtained from believers the respect he had



never received from his subjects when he had tried to impose his will on the Church. Byzantium emerged changed from the iconoclast crisis, and that change included not only its political boundaries but also the emperor's position towards the Church.

Like most of the changes of that period, that change had a religious expression: the coronation ritual. The ceremony began with the emperor avowing his faith and his solemnly pledging before the Church and the Patriarch that the faith would be kept pure. Then followed the anointment of the emperor. Through the Patriarch, the Church granted the emperor the gift to rule the Empire. After that the emperor bowed his head and the Patriarch himself crowned him with the words "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". The coronation ceremony used the same words as those spoken when believers and priests addressed God.

The coronation ceremony demonstrated to all subjects that the state and the Church were one. Both elements of that unity had their own place. Internal affairs of the Empire were handled by the Church and external issues, by the emperor.

The world had been finally arranged and order would be maintained. Even the emperor's expansion plans could not offend the faith. The Empire had finally understood that with the power of the Church, with the peaceful Christian sermon, it could win much more than with its legions. Instead of commanders, preachers came forward. The essential idea of a holy empire had changed.

## **D** The fight for the conversion of the Slavs

In the middle of the 9th century the Slavs were numerically dominant throughout the Balkans. Even in the south, a region which had belonged to Byzantine urban civilization for centu-

ries, only the coastal centres around Constantinople, Salonika, Athens, eastern Peloponnes, and Dalmatia were truly Byzantine. Byzantium understood it was essential to integrate the Slavs with its own subjects. That would be the only guarantee for internal peace in the Empire, which had to defend itself from the ever growing pressure of Arabs and Bulgarians. The emperors in Constantinople spent two long centuries solving that important problem.

The traditional measures for integrating different peoples into the Empire would not work with the Slavs. In the name of peace, Slavic communities were granted "foederati" rights. But instead of being loyal "foederati", the Slavs had been often insubordinate, threatening to interrupt communications between the Balkan imperial provinces. The emperors resorted to another traditional measure trying to solve this problem: deporting large groups of rebellious subjects far from the region. Thus by the end of the 7th century, many Slavs were deported to Asia Minor, and in their place large groups of imperial subjects from Asia Minor settled. But even so harsh a measure would not ease the tension caused by the Slavs' hostility to the Empire.

One of the most important reasons why the integration of the Slavs with Byzantine society did not work was the fact that Christianity had not deeply penetrated the Slavic community. The Slavs used to live separately in their own settlements, away from the cities that were the big religious centres of the Balkan imperial provinces.

While the two-century long efforts to integrate the Balkan Slavs remained almost fruitless, in Asia Minor the situation was different. Successes were achieved thanks to the monastic centre in Vitinia, known as early as the 4th century as Mount Olympus. Also called "Holy Wood", in the 8th century



Olympus became a centre for christianizing the Slavs in Asia Minor. A leading role in that process was played by the "Polychron" Monastery. The monks there did much more than convert the Slavs. One of the Monastery's most famous Fathers Superior, St Ioanikios (754-843), himself a Slav, is linked with the beginning of Slavic monasticism. Slavic missionaries came out of that pious environment and later christianized Slavs in other regions of Byzantium. St Ioaniki himself would conduct energetic missionary activities at the end of the 8th century. The speed with which Christianity spread beyond the Monastery could be explained by the fact that the austere monastic faith closely resembled Slavic sensibility.

Thanks to the efforts of the Church, Byzantium finally discovered the means it had so long sought for integrating the Slavs into the Byzantine society. That happened at the time when the Church and the Empire were united in the strongest alliance ever known in Byzantine history. The instrument, discovered by the Church, would become a strong weapon for imposing Orthodox authority throughout the Slavic world.

It was most important in the middle of the 9th century, when the Slavic card was played in the struggle for supremacy in Europe. At stake was a great prize: whoever ruled the Slavs would have a decisive hold on the future of the continent. Two major centres were competing for supremacy in the Christian world, Rome and Constantinople. The Constantinople patriarch Photius (810-897) and Roman Pope Nicolas I (858-867) were the two big figures in that competition, which became especially dramatic in Central Europe.

When it came to christianizing the vast Slavic world, both Churches were given the opportunity to demonstrate their advantages. Circumstances favored an old tradition of Orthodoxy

which became a strong weapon in converting the Slavs. That weapon was literacy and its strength had already been demonstrated by the successes that followed the creation of the scripts of Copts, Armenians, Georgians, Syrians, Goths, and other peoples.



## The brothers St Cyril and St Methodius

There is an interesting "paradox" in Slavic cultural history. Two churchmen – two Orthodox missionaries whom Byzantium depended on to integrate the Slavs and turn them into loyal subjects – became the symbol of Slavic identity. They were Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, sons of a Byzantine official in Salonika. The elder brother, Methodius (815-885), was the governor of a Byzantine province in south Macedonia, but he later became a monk and went to the Monastery of Polychron, subsequently becoming father superior. The younger brother, Constantine (827-869), studied at the Magnaoura School in Constantinople, the Empire's most important educational centre. His teacher there was Photius himself. In 851 Patriarch Photius chose Constantine, the master of theologian debate, to accompany him in a diplomatic mission to the Arabs.

Upon his return Constantine joined his brother at the Polychron Monastery and it is not difficult to perceive the important state mission they had been assigned. It was there that, in 855, their painstaking labour gave the Empire its main weapon in the christianization of the Slavs, the Slavonic script.

The Glagolitic alphabet was phonetically based on the Slavonic vernacular, spoken around Salonika, and derived from the cursive Greek. The first opportunity to use the new script came in 862, when envoys from Great Moravia arrived in Constantinople.



Pope Nicolas I had refused to recognize the independence of the Moravian Church and Prince Rostislav was trying to obtain that independence himself by introducing preaching in the Slavonic language. In this way, from the very beginning, the work of Constantine and Methodius, originally intended to integrate Slavdom into Christian culture, also turned into a means for its obtaining political independence.

To win the Slavs of Great Moravia, who were so close to the pope's sphere of influence, represented an important challenge to Byzantium. And that was the purpose of Constantine and Methodius' mission to Great Moravia in 863. There the two brothers trained many pupils through preaching in Slavonic and also completed their translation of the main liturgical books into Slavonic.

The success of preaching in Slavonic had impressed Pope Nicolas I very much. At that time he had taken the lead over the patriarch in Constantinople in the negotiations with the newly converted Bulgarians. In 867, concerned that the Moravian Slavs might slip out of his spiritual authority, the Pope invited the two brothers in Rome.

Rome received Constantine and Methodius officially. Pope Hadrian II (867-872) gave his blessing for the Scriptures being translated into Slavonic, and in this way he recognized Slavonic as a liturgical language. Some of the pupils of the two brothers were ordained as priests. All was marked with

solemn liturgies in Slavonic, Greek, and Latin. Constantine died in Rome in 869. A little before his death he was ordained as a monk and took the name of Cyril. Methodius was ordained as a bishop and in 870 he returned to Great Moravia to complete his mission.

The Pope did not have much choice. He either had to recognize the right of the Slavs in those territories to an independent Church or cede the spiritual power to his rival in Constantinople. That is why, in 873, the Pope undertook a decisive step by ordaining Methodius as Archbishop of Moravia and Pannonia. That brought him the gratitude of the Moravian Slavs and the animosity of the German clergy. After the death of Methodius in 885, the German clergy prohibited the use of Slavonic for preaching, and a little later the Moravian and Pannonian Church was attached to the Bavarian Archbishopric.

The disciples of Methodius were subjected to persecution and they fled Pannonia. Yet the example stayed: the western Slavs could be lastingly incorporated into Rome only through an independent Church. The legacy of Cyril and Methodius allowed the Slavs to be Christians without losing their ethnic identity.

The Moravian mission of Cyril and Methodius deepened the rivalry between Rome and Constantinople for the spiritual authority over Christians. That rivalry soon went beyond the spirit of theologian debate to become a major political issue of the Christian world.

### **CHECK-UP:**

- 1. Describe the situation in the Byzantine Empire after the iconoclast crisis.*
- 2. What changes could be observed in the concept of the Holy empire?*
- 3. Why was Slavdom in the centre of attention in the middle of the 9th century?*
- 4. How did Byzantium find the way to integrate the Slavs into the Empire and Christendom?*
- 5. Why was the legacy of Cyril and Methodius important to Slavdom?*



## FACES OF HISTORY:

### **The 'first' Byzantine, or Patriarch Photius**

The first five centuries (4th-9th c.) of Byzantium's one thousand-year long history had been an impressive scene of bloody clashes and wars, of religious and political intolerance. We would be right in defining those years as a moral decline. But intellectual culture had been elevated and tension in intellectual work remained high.

In the middle of the 9th century that tension noticeably disappeared. A new time was beginning. A time when Byzantine culture was to make a peculiar and unequivocal choice, and the foundations of an intellectual upsurge lasting for centuries were to be laid. That time had its own ideal, orderly knowledge. The encyclopedia became the most popular book. There were encyclopedias on agriculture, military science, marriage, superstitions, medicine, law, and management. There seemed to be no field of human activity that had not been systematized. It was in the 9th century that work began on collecting and arranging ancient manuscripts. Thanks to those Byzantine men of letters, we are now in possession of texts by Plato and Aristotle, the legacy of classical Greece. That desire for orderliness is the reason why today we look at Byzantium as a kind of "library" that nurtured modern European civilization.

The purpose of these encyclopedias is also interesting. Everything collected in them was designed for teaching. At that time the teacher and the school enjoyed high prestige. In the beginning of that century the model of that time, the Magnaoura School, was established. It was named after the palace of Magnaoura in which the classes were held. There they taught everything known at the time: grammar, rhetoric, and logic (trivium); and mathematical sciences: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (quadrivium). In the Middle Ages those were the so-called

"seven liberal arts" – those studies that together define education.

Ninth century culture had a specific purpose. Magnaoura was the place of education only for those involved in government: top officials in the imperial and church administration. It was there that Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher and Simeon had studied.

The most brilliant representative of the spirit of that time was Photius (820-891), a man of exceptional personality. The Byzantine emperor sent him, at the age of 20, as ambassador to the court of the Arab caliphs. Later he became a private tutor to the future Emperor Michael III. At the end of 858, he made a speedy career in the Church. Within three days he was ordained in all the ecclesiastical ranks so that he could become patriarch (858-867). From that time his name would be associated with the big Church policy. He inspired and supported the missions of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius to the Khazars in Eastern Europe, and to the Slavs in Great Moravia. In his time the Constantinople Patriarchate became the most elevated and authoritative center among the eastern churches.

In all his activities Photius had been perfect. But in one area he has remained unsurpassed – teaching. He taught at Magnaoura for a long time, and Constantine-Cyril was his pupil. During that period he wrote his encyclopedia on ancient literature. It included excerpts from 280 ancient authors, from Homer to the fathers of the Church, accompanied by short comments. The overall feeling from that impressive work is that Photius actually recommended to his pupils a kind of abridged reading. There were only selected passages from the works of the ancient authors, while his comments were at times boring.



We could not say that Photius was narrow-minded, but his work represented the outlook of a professional teacher. Therefore both ideas and books that came to his attention were firmly and severely assessed. We can distinguish the singular and too busy Byzantine intellectual who, from that point onwards, became the main

representative of Byzantine civilization. Such a person was devoted chiefly to creating values required by his time. But behind the dullness stood a man who knew a lot more than what he actually said. Behind his critical commentaries of the pagan authors, there was the collector's delight and admiration.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# 17

### THE BIRTH OF THE BULGARIAN KINGDOM (852-927)



#### **The conversion: the drama of a choice**

In the middle of the IX century Khan Boris I (852-889) was on the Bulgarian throne. He followed the traditional outlines of Bulgarian foreign policy, like his predecessors establishing the Bulgarian khanate as an important power in the European policy. At the beginning of his rule he was actively involved in attacks in areas in the middle of Europe. The final goal was imposing Bulgarian power over the Slavs along the mid-Danube River, to permanently control the steppe areas of Panonia.

At that time the Slavs in these areas are united around the strong state of Great Moravia. The rivalry between Khan Boris and Knyaz Rostislav was only a small part of a greater conflict. All important European powers, i.e. the East Frank kingdom and Byzantium, were involved in the battle

for getting the upper hand in Central Europe in the middle of the 9th century. The Bulgarian army suffered a couple of severe defeats within a short period.

The Byzantine army attacked Bulgaria in 863 – the year when the mission of the brothers Cyril and Methodius began in Great Moravia. The Bulgarians suffered defeat and had to negotiate for peace with Byzantium. The clauses of the contract offered by the Empire stipulated that the Zagore area had to be given back to the khanate. But the Bulgarian khan had to adopt Christianity from the Constantinople patriarchy. Boris had some other reasons, not less serious, to take that step. In the thinking of that time the victories of the Frankish Empire and Byzantium were closely connected with the might of the Cross. The Bulgarian Khan felt himself standing behind the victorious God on his way to imposing Bulgarian authority in Europe. For such resolve, no matter how well advised it



might be as a goal, a resolute man willing to take considerable risks was needed.

In the middle of the 9th century when it became clear that the future of Europe was integrally connected with Christianity, the Bulgarian khanate was lucky to be ruled by such a man. According to his contemporaries the whole life of Khan Boris till 864 was full of piety: the piety of the warrior, the severe ruler, the man of decisive action. All these features were of particular importance to Bulgarians.

The chronicles from that time indicate that the Khan together with his closest relatives was converted to Christianity in the palace in Pliska in 864. The Byzantine bishop who arrived to lead the ceremony gave Boris the new name of Michail after the name of the current Byzantine emperor. Soon after that the Bulgarians' mass conversion to Christianity began.

No doubt the Bulgarian conversion was a great success for Byzantium because that meant winning one more nation for orthodoxy. In Byzantine thought all Christians were a united spiritual community: the Church. Yet political unity – a unified empire – was needed as well for final success. The only place on Earth where that could be realised was the “New Rome”: Constantinople; and the only ruler on Earth that had the legal right to realise it was the Byzantine emperor. According to the Byzantines, Christ himself entrusted to the emperor alone the important mission of exercising, on his behalf, supreme political power over all Christians. Therefore all Christian rulers were subordinate to the emperor, since only through him could they get God's blessing and rule legally. His unique mission was reflected in his title, “emperor of the Romaioi”, which all contemporaries interpreted as “emperor of all Christians”. The existence of one God meant that there could be only one empire with one centre (Constantinople) and one emperor.

That interpretation was of paramount importance for the nations that adopted Christianity from Byzantium. With the conversion they were also spiritually attached to the values of the Byzantine civilisation and Byzantine imperial doctrine. That attachment was harder than stone because the newly converted adopted it as a religion, which is why the Bulgarian conversion was considered a tremendous success in Constantinople. Christianity and the imperial civilisation were supposed to make the Bulgarian ruler subordinate to Constantinople in a way that Byzantine arms had never before accomplished.

Yet, that was contrary to the traditions of power inherited by the Bulgarian ruler. Boris adopted the Cross as a guarantee for his victory. Christianity was supposed to enforce the sword of the Bulgarians, not to tame their wish to dominate in Europe.

## **B** The autonomy of the Bulgarian church: between Rome and Constantinople

From the beginning the Bulgarian adoption of Christianity had an explicit political meaning besides the religious one. The only way of adopting the religion and avoiding the power of the Emperor in Constantinople was to have an autonomous church. And right after adoption of Christianity the efforts of Boris were oriented to that. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, politely but firmly refused the request of the Bulgarian ruler. Boris did not hesitate to approach the other big divine centre: Rome.

In the middle of the 860s the relationship between Rome and Constantinople were extremely tense because of their rivalry. Boris took advantage of the situation. At his request clerics came from



Rome, after the refusal from Constantinople, to convert the Bulgarians to Christianity once again. However, the Roman pope, Nikolai I, did not recognise the autonomy of the Bulgarian church.

It was five years during which Boris pursued his objective before Byzantium realised the great danger from the Roman influence so close to its borders. In 869 Boris sent his messengers to the big church meeting in Constantinople. At a special sitting on March 4, 870 the young Bulgarian church was announced as an autonomous archbishopric. Its first archbishop, Joseph, took holy orders. After that the Roman clerics were removed from Bulgaria.

Some years after converting to Christianity the Bulgarians had their own spiritual leader. He took holy orders in Constantinople but before that he was supposed to be nominated by the local bishops with the absolute approval of the Bulgarian ruler. Bulgaria had made a very important step on its way to independence from Byzantium. However there was one more step in establishing a completely autonomous religious life, i.e. the construction of autonomous religious hierarchy: entrusting the care of Bulgarian Christians' souls in the hands of Bulgarian clerics.

## The Students of Cyril and Methodius

In 886 something happened that completely turned the fate of Bulgaria. Some of the students of Cyril and Methodius reached the Bulgarian borders in search of a refuge after the collapse of their work in Great Moravia in 885. These refugees carried in their luggage the tool that the Bulgarian ruler needed: liturgical books in the Slavic language. Byzantium itself forged that tool with the view of adopting Slavs to the Church and integrating them into the Empire. A pri-

celess tool, it assisted Boris in creating the Bulgarian clerics who became the basis for an independent Bulgarian church, itself an important prerequisite for preserving Bulgarian autonomy.

Bulgaria had vast boundaries and Boris' task could not be delayed any longer. Therefore, while Naoum remained in the capital, Kliment was sent to work on the cause in the opposite part of the Bulgarian lands: the Ohrid area. The ruler's treasury was generous to those important teachers. Boris spared no expenses for the monasteries round Pliska and Ohrid where the teachers were working at. Very soon his policy was rewarded. Instead of being places for seclusion the monasteries became centres for extremely active social life. The students of Kliment and Naoum were numerous and the need for Bulgarian clerics was big. The activity of these worthy enlighteners gave to Bulgaria its first literary centres. An imposing number of Slavonic books was collected in Pliska and Ohrid – books that had been for ages the source of cultural energy from the Balkan range to the Urales and from Thrace to the Baltic Sea.

Boris ruled in peace till 889 and then he retired at a monastery. He left that secluded life just once when his successor, Vladimir (Rasate), tried to ruin what had been created and restore the place of old Bulgarian god, Tangra. The defector was severely punished in accordance with the laws of his time. Boris convened a national meeting in Preslav in 893 so that the choice of Christianity by the Bulgarians would be confirmed by all subjects. The road of Christian Bulgaria was outlined then. The meeting reached three important decisions. Preslav was announced as the new capital and the third son of Boris, Simeon, was declared ruler. Most importantly, the liturgical language would be Slavonic. That decision eliminated any obstacles to giving church posts in Bulgaria to Bulgarians. It completed Bulgarian church autonomy. In ad-



dition, Slavic became the official language of the ruler's administration. Thus the language of the church became the leading secular language.

Boris was among the few rulers who lived to see his dreams come true. Having paid a high price for it, he left a new and united Bulgaria firmly based on its autonomous church and armed with a mighty weapon: the Slavonic alphabet. His successors would use this Church and alphabet with varying success; however, no hardships would be able to wipe out the Bulgarian presence in Europe.

## **D** Simeon: the idea of renewal of the Christian Empire

It is not accidental that Boris pointed Simeon (893–927) as successor. Having been prepared by his father to become the head of the Bulgarian church, Simeon was educated in the traditions of the new religion; he received an education considered solid in his time at the Magnaura school in Constantinople.

The first decade of his rule passed with warfare in the south-southwest – the traditional area for efforts to integrate the Slavs into the Bulgarian state. During four wars with Byzantium the young Bulgarian ruler was skilful enough both with strong Bulgarian weaponry and the superb Byzantine diplomacy acquired in Constantinople. Having failed to control Simeon with the sword, the Empire, in its attempt to divert the Bulgarian ruler from Byzantine lands, provoked the Magyars into invading northern Bulgarian territories. Simeon used his diplomatic experience gained in Constantinople and set up another nomadic population, the Pechenegs, against the Magyars. Under pressure from the Bulgarians and the Pechenegs, the Magyars were driven to Central Europe where the Great Moravian principality suffered a smashing blow.

In 904 the Bulgarian army reached Salonica and the Empire had to recognise its defeat. A peace treaty was signed which stipulated that Byzantium had to pay an yearly tax to the Bulgarians; Byzantium thus recognised Simeon's rule over lands in Thrace and Macedonia annexed by him to Bulgaria.

Byzantium paid in gold so that it would stop living under the menace of the Bulgarian sword. It watched closely and with alarm the actions of the immoderate Bulgarian whose energy had no limits. Inspired by the ruler, new, unseen construction in Preslav took place. Within only three decades the new Bulgarian capital was built in gold, marble and the colours of the Preslav-painted ceramics. The lavish palace of Simeon was surrounded by more than 20 churches, among which stood out the golden church of the ruler. Only one other ruler was surrounded in the same way by sacred buildings: the emperor in Constantinople. Simeon had the “capital of the world” in mind while constructing his own, and Byzantium had serious reasons to worry. Everything became a weapon in the hands of the energetic Bulgarian: stone, gold, even the alphabet.

At the time of Simeon the two big centres that prepared Bulgarian clerics, the capital and the Ohrid area, became literary centres. The copying of liturgical books became a tiny part of their activity. Quite a lot of energy was involved in translating the books of famous Christian theologians. Some writings of the Byzantine elite were also translated. A circle of highly educated literary men was formed round the ruler in Preslav. The Slavonic language to them was not only a liturgical but literary. John Ekzarh, Chernorizets the Brave, and Constantin of Preslav were among those dignified literary men whose efforts resulted in the creation of part of Bulgarian literature; their work included collections of homilies, poetry, and polemic or eulogistic speeches. The Preslav translators “finished up” many of



the translations of popular Byzantine collections – chronicles, accounts of the creation of the world, etc. – adding to them descriptions of the Bulgarian capital or details from the time of the “glorious, devout” Bulgarian ruler Simeon. Inspired and generously supported by Simeon, those wise men improved the glagolitic alphabet created by Cyril and Methodius. They used as a sample the Byzantine hand-written style which was used in the emperor’s office majuscule. Researchers later called that ordinary alphabet “the Cyrillic alphabet.”

The achievements in the 10th century resulting from the efforts of the Bulgarian ruler made it known in history as “the Golden Age” of Slavonic Christian culture. The writings created at that time were of major importance in the history of Bulgarians. Similarly important for Bulgarian history was the goal in whose name Simeon spared no efforts to build schools and libraries, collect whole armies of translators, and improve the alphabet. That goal was Constantinople. What the Bulgarian ruler wanted was nothing less than rule over the whole Christian world. An according to ideas of the time, there was one single place from which Christians could be ruled: the Emperor’s throne in Constantinople. That is why Simeon repeated all the steps that the emperors in Constantinople had been following for ages in order to prove the unique character of their power.

## **E** Simeon: “the Emperor of the Romaioi”

The grandiose plan of winning political power over the Christian “universe” had been guiding Simeon since the very beginning of his rule. In the name of that aim he not only gave incredible proof of the ruler’s piety, for instance sponsoring the “Golden age”. He also never hesitated to reprimand

the Byzantine emperors that they were often sinful to God and their religion, as a result of which the Empire suffered rebellions, heresies, and Arab invasions.

In the summer of 913 the Bulgarian ruler stood before the walls of Constantinople. He came to seek satisfaction for the breach of the contract and the unpaid annual tax. Yet the circumstances gave him the chance to get closer to his aim. At the throne in Constantinople was Constantin VII Porphyrogenetes who was not of age yet. There was a regency ruling in his name and lead by Patriarch Nicholas the Mystic. Simeon started negotiations instead of war, making it clear that he would withdraw his army if the underaged Constantin took his daughter as his wife. That simple condition confused the Empire more than any of his terrifying victories. It was no secret to anyone in the Byzantine court what the newly converted “barbarian” wanted, since he was well-versed in the complicated language of Byzantine diplomacy. He wanted to become “the father of the emperor” (Basileopathor). If Byzantium accepted that condition it would mean accepting the Bulgarian ruler as guardian of the minor emperor and granting him the power in Constantinople till the emperor came of age. In other words the Empire had to give to Simeon rule over all Christians. Confused but weak Byzantium was forced to promise and fulfil Simeon’s condition. As soon as his army withdrew from Constantinople, preparation for a war with the Bulgarians began.

The Empire was diligently getting ready for a clash lasting four years. A whole network of unions with Serbians, Pechenegs, etc. was established in hopes of securing the victory from all sides. When the two armies finally met on August 20, 917 along the Acheloi river (today Pomorie) the Byzantines suffered a terrible defeat. Simeon decided to take for himself the title that he deserved after realizing that Byzantium would never give up the



emperor's crown. In 918 he called a meeting in Preslav nominating a Bulgarian patriarch. Shortly after that the newly nominated patriarch crowned at a festive ceremony the Bulgarian ruler as "the emperor of the Bulgarians and the Romaioi". The Slavonic equivalent of Simeon's new title was "tsar of all Bulgarians and Greeks".

From then on the sword became the inevitable means in the relationship with Constantinople. Fortune decided that Empire would suffer for decades the weapon that was created by it. Years earlier in Constantinople the tsar of the Bulgarians had learned that unified imperial power over all Christians was given by God himself to the emperor in "the New Rome". That is why the offer of Emperor Romanus Lacapenus, to recognise Simeon as "the emperor of the Bulgarians" in 923, could never be ac-

cepted. "Byzantine" Simeon was well aware that such a title would only disperse the unity of the emperor's power.

Nothing could stop Tsar Simeon. He could have had everything. All lands on the Balkan peninsular could have been his. Yet his attention was captured by Constantinople. It was not as plunder that he wanted "the city of Constantine", and that was well known to the Byzantines. He wanted it solely because from there alone, from the Christian emperors' palace, he could rule the Christian world. That is why the Empire fought desperately. It gave him the lands taken by his conquering army. It could give him anything but Constantinople. Only Simeon's death in 927 stopped his volcanic energy, and the Byzantines kept on talking about him for a long time with both awe and terror and never with contempt.

### **CHECK UP:**

1. List the reasons that made Khan Boris adopt Christianity.
2. Describe the acts of the Bulgarian ruler that aimed at gaining autonomy for the Bulgarian church.
3. What were the decisions of the Preslav meeting in 893?
4. Why was the rule of Tsar Simeon defined as "the Golden Age"?
5. What was the political aim of Tsar Simeon? List his reasons.

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **"The Simeon" Syndrome**

The time of Simeon opened the cultural-symbolic heritage of Byzantium to Bulgarian rival claims. It marked the beginning of longlasting attempts "to replace" or "imitate" the Empire which outlined the unique specific features of the orthodox Bulgarian Middle Ages.

At the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th centuries, having lost a great deal of its mystic halo of undefeatedness, Byzantium still remained

for Bulgarians a golden dream, the real centre of the universe, and Constantinople remained the magic capital, full of treasures and riches, a bright symbol of power, of beauty and glory.

In that respect a certain duality in the attitude of the Bulgarians towards Byzantium was registered.

On the one hand, this was a military conquering dream: the dream of the stranger who had come from a long



distance to win by force the treasures and the lands of the Empire. That was the constant struggle of the Bulgarians. On the other hand there was the deep and devout admiration of Byzantium and the wish to follow its example in everything: to integrate itself, however painfully, with that glorious and centuries-long tradition that Byzantium represented. The adoption of Christianity and the sincere orthodoxy of Bulgarians would give an incredible dynamism to the tendency above mentioned.

Simeon aggravated that conflict to the utmost. He had been so much impressed all his life by the beauty and grandeur of the Byzantine palace that he created a replica in his new capital: Preslav the Great. The culture created under his guardianship was not and could not be original. Simeon himself was a Byzantine student and the Slavonic alphabet of the Cyril and Methodius was also based on the Byzantine culture. During Simeon's

time the Glagolic alphabet was changed for another Slavonic alphabet, the Cyrillic alphabet, which was much closer to the Greek one.

As the cultural Byzantization grew stronger, the political and the military confrontation increased. That conflict brought tragedy to Simeon's Bulgaria but it brought as well grandeur to Slavonic culture. And if Simeon failed to realise his main intention – to displace and replace the Byzantine emperors in the Christian world – he managed to realise another one: Bulgaria became "the second Byzantium" for the rest of the Slavs. Fr. Dvornik, a contemporary historian, describes Bulgaria from that time as follows: "Slavic in language and Byzantine in spirit. Simeon's Bulgaria became the conductor of the Byzantine influence among the rest of the other Slavonic population – the Serbians and the Russians in particular".

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# 18

### THE BULGARIAN SOCIETY – THE DIFFICULT ROAD TO CHANGE (10TH CENTURY)

#### **A** The time of Tsar Petur (927-970)

After the death of Simeon in 927 a 30-year peace treaty was signed between Bulgaria and Byzantium. It was sealed with a marriage between the granddaugh-

ter of Romanus Lacapenus, the former rival of Simeon, and the Bulgarian ruler Petur, the second born son of Simeon. As a sign of the big change in Bulgarian-Byzantine relationships the princess from Constantinople accepted the name Irine, which in Greek means "peace". Among the clauses of the peace treaty there were



two of paramount importance to the Bulgarians. The first gave Petur the right to the title, "Tsar of the Bulgarians". The second, which was included at the specific request of Romanus Lacapenus, recognised the patriarchal dignity and the complete autonomy (autocephality) of the Bulgarian church.

Circumstances demanded that Tsar Petar gave up the extreme foreign policy aims of his glorious father. At his time an advanced stage of Christianization was felt, and the authority had to use all efforts to drive remaining obstacles away. The consequences of accepting Christianity led to a host of difficulties in the 930s.

Three attempts were made to usurp the tsar's power within three years. In 928 Ivan, the younger brother of Petur, was accused of organising a conspiracy against the tsar and put into prison. In 930 Michael the monk, who was the eldest son of Simeon, was at the head of a rebellion aiming at the same objective. The feeling of insecurity resulting from the battles for the throne was increased by the frequent attacks of a wave of nomadic peoples. The few surviving written documents from the period testify that the most frequent attacks from the 930s to the 960s were those of the Magyars, who caused serious damage to the Bulgarian lands.

It was Petur who happened to be the tsar at these difficult times. In the chronicles he was mentioned as a real orthodox ruler dedicated to religious deeds and books.

## **B** The Bulgarian church and the clergy

The new Bulgarian church had been enjoying generous recognition since the very beginning. It was the eighth one among the East orthodox churches after the Constantinople, the Alexandria, the Antiochia and Jerusalem patriarchies and

the Cypriote, the Sinai and the Georgian archbishoprics. With the contract dating from 927 it received universal recognition for its work imposing the Slavic language as a liturgical one. The contract recognised as well the complete autonomy of the Bulgarian church. At the head was a patriarch who already took holy orders in Preslav and not in Constantinople. The see of the patriarch were in the Bulgarian capital which was in accordance with the orthodox tradition, wherein civilian and clerical authority were inseparable.

The issues important to the Bulgarian church were settled at special meetings. All higher clergymen, representatives of the lower clergymen, and the laity took part, but usually the tsar headed these meetings. He sealed with his red royal seal the resolutions resulting from the meetings and they were thus transformed into a state law valid for all citizens. Current church issues that did not require a special meeting were resolved by a constantly functioning body: the synod. The most outstanding clergymen in the kingdom sat in it, presided over by the patriarch.

At the time of Tsar Petur the administrative hierarchy of the Bulgarian church was finalized, and it followed the administrative division of the state. The clerical power of the patriarch was over all the territories within the kingdom. They were subdivided in several bigger clerical areas: eparchies, presided over by bishops. The smallest clerical-administrative unit, usually a single town or village, or a church, was the parish, presided over by the priest.

The increased needs of the Christian religion demanded an increase of clergymen. They formed a special group of people wholly dedicated to the church, and enjoyed the recognition of Bulgarian society because of the great importance of their mission. The clergymen took the responsibility for creating Bulgarian Christian culture. For example, the extant books from that time were written



by clergymen. Among the clergymen were Kliment of Ohrid, Naoum of Preslav, Constantin of Preslav, John Exzarch, and Chernorizets the Brave.

The efforts of the clergymen in the 10th century to win the minds and the souls of the Bulgarians for Christianity resulted in the creation of many collections of prayers, passionals or cautionary sermons, either in Bulgarian or in translation. Intended to be read in the church, these writings soon became means of Christian education outside it. The clear presentation of Christian values satisfied the incredible thirst for reading and writing aroused by Christianity across Bulgarian society. In order to meet the curiosity of the ordinary people the priests translated or sometimes wrote an impressive number of popular books. Among them were some noncanonized texts (apocrypha), different stories and novels describing events from the New and the Old Testament, curious events in nature, or simply fiction. Very often the names of characters and places in the translated books were changed to Bulgarian ones. These writings had a religious moral and were in a simple language easily understood by everybody, and thus had widespread circulation.

The extremely active preaching and writing activity of the Bulgarian clergy in the 10th century responded to an intense time. Bulgarian society suffered dramatic changes from the cultural stereotype that imposes Christianity. Therefore the church had the important mission of leading the people successfully through that difficult change.



## Bulgarians and Christianity

The massive adoption of Christianity untypical of barbarian peoples brought to the Church many people who formally followed the Christian but still kept their pagan traditions. On the

other hand in the mind of many Bulgarians the Church continued to be associated with Byzantine military power, which had spiritually and politically subordinated them to Byzantium.

Therefore favourable conditions for the spread of heresy among the newly baptised people were created. Among the Bulgarians were Catholics, the Paulicians and the Massalians. Yet the most widespread heresy was the Bogomil heresy. Its leader, the priest, Bogomil, preached in the Bulgarian lands in the middle of the 10th century. Central to the heresy was the idea that the world resulted from the conflict between good and evil, between God and the Devil. The earthly world full of sins and sufferings was of course created by the Devil. The most dramatic clash between good and evil was in man, who had the body of the Devil and the soul of God. The Bogomils believed that the real salvation of man would occur when he freed his soul from "the chains of the body". That is why the Bogomils recommended abstinence from food, water, sleep, etc. They claimed even more: man should abstain from labour too, because "labour multiplies the domain of the Devil". Having chosen this way of Salvation, the Bogomils did not need the mediation of the Church. They discarded the whole religious ritual (the sacrament, worship of the cross, the icons, the saints and the holidays). The clergymen were discarded too, considered to be "slaves of the Devil".

The heretic ideas endangered the religion of the Bulgarians. That is why the Bulgarian church made great efforts to disperse the heresy. Those believers who could read absorbed the magnificent polemic writing of Presviter Kozma, "A Sermon against the Bogomils", written in the middle of the 10th century. The others were assisted by the devoted work of the monks.

The Bulgarian monasteries, like those in Western Europe and Byzantium, were transformed into a unique cultural force. The monasteries in Preslav and



Ohrid were both centres for the clergy, places for devout seclusion, literary writings, and technical innovations. The famous Preslav painted ceramics were made by the monks. The monks were honoured both by the elite of the Bulgarian society and ordinary people. The personal example of the monks' diligence in faith was usually much more influential than the preaching in church. Bulgarians often sought advice from the monks and their questions were not related to religion only.

In the 10th century the name of the monk Ivan of Rila, the founder of the Rila monastery, became extremely popular. The legend told about some messengers who brought gifts to the monastery from Tsar Petur. The monk sent them back telling the tsar that he should keep his wealth and use it not for his pleasure but for arms and the army, for the poor and the homeless, so that there would be strength and prosperity in his country. Due to that legend Ivan of Rila was later on announced to be the patron of the Bulgarian tsars. Because of his remarkable and devout Christian life, Ivan of Rila was ranked after his death among the saints of the Bulgarian church. His cult clearly formed the basic traits of the Bulgarian character during the Middle Ages: extreme faith and loyalty to the tsar.

## **D** Bulgarian society on the road to unity

The adoption of Christianity resulted in massive building of new churches needed for the newly baptised people. The old Bulgarian cities of Ohrid, Pliska and Preslav became important spiritual centres. In Pliska alone the newly built churches numbered over thirty. Bulgarians mastered simultaneously both the church and the arrangement of space around it. It became a place of active social life, of squares and bazaars. All city streets were oriented from the area surrounding the

church. Thus, parallel with the adoption of religion, Bulgarians adopted a new culture untypical for them – an urban one which had been adopted by Christianity as its own for a long time.

The introduction of Christianity in Bulgarian society was accompanied by a new spirit which did not change social structure but changed relationships between its different strata. Far from the idea of diminishing the difference between the aristocracy and ordinary people, the new faith brought these groups together in church. They learned there that all people were equal before God who is above everyone. The demand of the bishop to give alms referred to everybody because everybody was sinful and could be in the situation of the beggar, the orphan, or the roamer in front of the church door. Inside the church there was no place for the traditional tension between the few rich and the multitudes. Instead, all had the common goal of salvation, which depended on no earthly force. In the spirit of Christian justice, everybody was expected to be zealous, ardent, and generous within his means. The highest standards were applied to the ruler and to the first among the Christians in Bulgaria: the patriarch.

Thus Christianity established the stable basis of Bulgarian society. Bulgarians and Slavs, rich and poor, educated and illiterate became a stable integrity. The unity of all these different people was guaranteed by a principle that was beyond the state itself, beyond the transience of everyday life, guaranteed by God. Throughout the Middle Ages Bulgarian society coincided with that of the Bulgarian church.

The dissemination of Christianity greatly helped in mixing the two main ethnic components of Bulgarian society, Slavs and Bulgarians, which had begun earlier. The steady foreign policy of integrating areas populated with Slavs within the Bulgarian state made the Slavs the dominant subjects of the Bulgarian tsar.



The introduction of Slavic into liturgies finally defined that dominance culturally. The name "Bulgarian" during the 10th century was no longer ethnic but a sign of citizenship. Differing traditions of the Slavs and the Bulgarians began to gradually be obliterated by common rituals and Christian law. The first common Bulgarian law of the type was created during the tenth century and called "The law for suing people." It was later used as a sample by other Slavic Christian states.

The term "Bulgarian population" during 10th century already meant the community of people who recognise the

Bulgarian tsar and the Bulgarian patriarch as their leaders. Tribal identity began to gradually lose its meaning, replaced by religious and political identity. That explains how later on Bulgarian society easily integrated vast groups of Uzis, Pechenegs, and other tribes without severe clashes. Bulgarians from the 10th century onwards often used common Christian names which today are considered to be Bulgarian: Maria, Georgi, Simeon, Petur, etc. The change in the naming system and its subsequent stability was an obvious proof of the depth of Bulgarian Christian society.

## CHECK-UP

1. *What were the reasons for signing a peace treaty in 927 and what were the main consequences resulting from it?*

2. *Describe the structure of the Bulgarian church and list proofs in support of the idea that the recognition of its autonomy was deserved.*

3. *What new cultural standards were adopted by the Bulgarians parallel with the adoption of Christianity?*

4. *What were the means used by Christianity to establish unity within the Bulgarian society?*

## FACES OF HISTORY:

### A sect against society – the Bogomil heresy

The rule of Tsar Petur is connected with the appearance of the Bogomils. This is the name used to call the followers of the heretic, the preacher priest Bogomil. That heresy was the most serious challenge for Bulgarian society in the Middle Ages.

There is no doubt that the total spiritual tension at that time of total cultural-religious change in Bulgarian society (the tenth century) created favourable conditions for the dissemination of different radical heresies. Christian preaching in an intelligible language aroused the creative energy of the ordinary Bulgarian peasants.

Parallel to that, a great part of their understanding of faith consisted of rude practicisms which were closely connected with archaism. This tendency disputed sometimes explicitly or implicitly the main truths of the Church. Despite the successes of Christianization during the 9-10th centuries, for some Bulgarians the Byzantine church remained a weapon in the hands of the old enemy – Byzantium. Thus part of Bulgarian society appeared to be psychologically ready to give birth to an active spirit of opposition to the Church. Fully in compliance with medieval traditions that spirit took the form of a religious



movement, a heresy that united the dissatisfied ones. The general political and spiritual crisis during the 10th century in the Bulgarian kingdom gave stronger arguments for the protests of the heretics.

In the centre of the Bogomil movement was the archaic religious idea of dualism. According to it the world is the result of an eternal and grand conflict, the conflict between good and evil, between the superb heavenly world of God and the earthly world which was deformed, full of suffering and sins, and created by the Devil. According to the Bogomils the real salvation of man is possible only at the cost of humiliation and even destruction of the human body. The salvation offered by the Bogomils was available to the few people who could bear the extreme hardship of voluntary imposed sacrifice, and thus earn by themselves the right to personal contact.

The appearance and dissemination of the Bogomil movement indicated the strenuous religious life in Bulgarian society. Of course it was influenced by the understanding of the people from the social periphery, the interpretations of commoners. The conclusions of the Bogomils were strictly against the existing social order: the basic principles of understanding between the authority and the subjects, the aristocracy and the common people. They attacked the principles which were the basis of Bulgarian Christian society. They openly preached disobedience to the tsar and the bolyars

and disputed traditional forms of morality like marriage and family.

The Bogomils lived in special communes where everyday life was strictly subordinated to religious rules. These communes were lead by a dedetz. His absolute spiritual power spread over the two categories of followers: "the superb" (the Bogomil preachers were nominated among them) and the common followers. The establishment of socio-religious structures parallel to the Church definitely weakened Bulgarian social and religious unity in the middle ages. Even more destructive was the ideal which was the basis for the heretics' ideas of social organization. That was the idea of the sect, of the 'iron' organization of the select few. In order to survive in the surrounding world that detested them, they had to establish a special type of community whose strength and energy was completely dependant on the war lead by the sectarians for their survival. Therefore the sectarian community could only exist based on extremity, on the finite mobilization of spiritual powers.

The destructive character of the Bogomil movement was most explicitly expressed in its sectarian essence. Contrary to the positive church efforts for gradual development, change, and renewal, the Bogomil movement offered Bulgarian society a destructive sectarian energy. Therefore the struggle against the Bogomil movement was not only for purity of faith, but to a much greater extent, for the survival of Bulgarian society.



## 19

## THE GREAT EPOCH ON THE BALKANS: THE EMPIRE AGAINST THE KINGDOM (MID-10TH – MID-11TH CENTURIES)

### **A** The time of the military commanders

One day in August 944 all the people from Constantinople went out in the streets to meet the famous military commander, Joan Kurkuas. He had managed to take from the Arabs the cloth with the "image of Christ not made by human hand" that was in their hands. The reversion of that precious relic was celebrated by a solemn liturgy at the "Saint Sophia" church.

The festivity in Constantinople was the symbolic beginning of a new time for Byzantium. In the middle of the 10th century began the "Byzantine epoch," a time of triumphant victories, when Byzantine missionaries conceded to the military commanders the leading role in imperial politics. The Arabs were smashed and the emperors in Constantinople directed their attention to the North and the West. The whole energy of the Empire was oriented to achieving a great goal: the restoration of Byzantium from the time of Justinianus. That goal brought to the throne individuals experienced in battle. The emperors whose names were emblematic from the "Byzantine epoch" were Nicephorus II Phocas, Joan II Tzimisches, and Basil II Macedonian.

At the time of Nceiphorus II Phocas (963-9690), Byzantine power in

the East was restored. Having got Syria and Crete back within the Empire's boundaries, it put an end to Arabic power over that region and to the superiority of the Arabic fleet.

The 960s proved the time to strengthen the Byzantine positions in the Balkans. Byzantium faced again the old problem with the Bulgarians. The problems caused by Simeon's empire were still remembered. Byzantium still had to pay an annual tax to the Bulgarian King, Petur (927-970), though now his sons, Boris and Roman, were kept in Constantinople as a guarantee for keeping the peace. Bulgaria itself suffered strong attacks from the Magyars and its position on the Balkans was not as secure as it had been at the beginning of the century. In the mid-960s the Bulgarian tsar's messengers who came to collect the annual tax were driven away rudely. Emperor Nicephorus Phocas even started a march in the Bulgarian lands, yet the Bulgarian problem could not be solved with a single attack. Then Constantinople applied the old Byzantine tactics and directed the army of the Kiev Knyaz, Svyatoslav, from the north to the Bulgarian lands.

The Kiev principality was established at the end of the 9th century in Eastern Europe (today Ukraine). It expanded its boundaries fast and Byzantium imposed its influence over the Kiev knyazes. At the time of Svyatoslav (945-972) the Kiev



principality triumphed decisively over the Hazar haganate and imposed its power in the lands to the north of the Caucasus. In the middle of the 10th century the Byzantine provinces on the Crimean Peninsula faced the strong pressure of the Kiev armies. When Emperor Nicephorus Phocas managed to direct Knyaz Svyatoslav to Bulgaria he hoped to simultaneously settle both the threats to the Crimean Peninsula and the problems caused by the Bulgarians.

## **B** The captured tsar: the fall of Preslav

The first march of the army of Svyatoslav into the lands to the south of the Danube in 968 was sudden, impetuous and immediately successful. Inspired by his easy victory over the Bulgarians, Svetoslav started making plans for an attack over Constantinople. When Byzantines learned of these plans they arranged a rapid attack by the Pechenegs to Kiev, and Svyatoslav was removed from the Balkans, though only for a year. Yet, Nicephorus Phocas achieved his goal: there was peace between Bulgaria and Byzantium.

The second march of Svetoslav in 969 was at his own initiative, and the whole of Eastern Europe, including the Bulgarian capital of Preslav, was conquered. The Bulgarian aristocratic elite were taken prisoners by the Kiev knyaz. The new Bulgarian Tsar, Boris (970-971), became a hostage in his own palace. Severe warriors, who offered human beings as sacrifices to their pagan gods, kept the "security" of Simeon's grandson. This was the guarantee that the Bulgarians would keep their obligation to give their army to Svyatoslav in case of war. The Kiev knyaz did not keep his intentions secret that he wanted to settle a permanent power on the Balkans, and he mounted a couple of devastating attacks in Thrace.

The Byzantine reaction was not delayed. A strong Byzantine army lead by the Emperor Joan Tzimisches (969-976) crossed the Balkan range and conquered Preslav in 971. In most cases the Bulgarians behind the fortresses themselves opened the doors for Joan Tzimisches, "the liberator from the pagans." That made Svyatoslav kill all remaining Bulgarian captives. This ferocious act satisfied the pagan's anger but could not stop the Byzantine army's invasion, and Svyatoslav closed himself in Drustar. After a siege for a couple of months the Kiev Knyaz had to leave Bulgaria.

Instead of restoring Boris II to the throne, as Joan Tzimisches had promised, he took the entire royal family to Constantinople. The conquered Bulgarian lands became Byzantine provinces and the capital, Preslav, was now called Joannopolis after the name of the emperor.

At the hippodrome in Constantinople in front of the audience the emperor took off the crown from the Bulgarian tsar. Following medieval symbolism, that meant that Bulgaria was not an independent country any longer, and it became part of the Byzantine Empire. Three decades after the glorious leader, Kurkuas, the emperor Joan Tzimisches also presented the valuable trophy to the church. A solemn liturgy was celebrated in the Saint Sophia temple to specially commemorate the decisive victory over the Bulgarians. No one realized then that there would be forty years to come which would cost a lot of trouble to the Empire.

## **C** The time of the comitopoulites

After Eastern Bulgaria was conquered by the Byzantine emperor, the Western Bulgarian lands in Macedonia remained untouched by the military actions of the new rule. At the head of the



Bulgarian resistance in these lands were the sons of rebel Nikola: the comitopulites David, Moses, Aaron, and Samuil. They neither accepted the Byzantine emperor's rule nor his right to deprive the Bulgarians of their crown.

After the death of Joan Tzimisches in 976 insurrections arose in Byzantium among the claimants for the throne. Seizing the moment, the brothers started military actions against the Empire. David and Moses died in battle. The actions of the comitopoulites were felt after the younger brother of Boris II, Roman (976-997), arrived in Macedonia; a legitimate successor to the Bulgarian throne, he had managed to evade the Byzantine captivity. Roman was declared a tsar and thus the power of the legitimate dynasty was considered restored. A war with the Empire started to restore the old boundaries of the kingdom. Samuil was the most competent among the military commanders of the Bulgarian army. He was a man with extraordinary qualities who lead the Bulgarians in battles against Byzantium.

Within a couple of years the Bulgarian soldiers stabilized the power in the western Bulgarian lands and started attacking continental Greece. Their attacks reached Thessaly, Ellada, Epirus, and Peloponesus. The southern boundary of the Bulgarian kingdom already included vast areas of Northern Greece. In reply to that challenge the young Byzantine Emperor, Basil II (97-1025), started a military march to Sredets (today Sofia) – one of the most important fortresses in the independent Bulgarian lands. The chronicles keep lively memories of the catastrophic defeat suffered by the Byzantine army on August 17, 986 at the passage Trajan's gate, in the Balkan range (near Ichtiman). Some time later when new battles for the throne started, the defeat at the Trajan gate was one of the strongest arguments of the opponents of Basil II.

After the victory at the Trajan gate Samuil lead his army to eastern Bulgaria.

Internal conflicts in Constantinople made things easier for the Bulgarian attack, and it took only a couple of years to liberate the Bulgarian lands between the Balkan range, the Black Sea, and the lands north of the Danube. About 991 the previous territorial unity of Bulgaria was restored. In the mid-990s the Bulgarian army started a strong attack south-southwest (towards Salonica, the Khalkidiki Peninsula and Peloponesus). Despite the fact that there were no stable victories the free movement of the Bulgarian army caused problems for the Empire. It was already obvious that the Bulgarians were getting ready for a final attack against Byzantium.

## **D** Tsar Samuil: the edge of the sword

In 997 Tsar Roman died without leaving an heir and then the most dignified Bulgarian, Samuil, ascended the throne. The first steps of the new tsar were dedicated to finding allies in the northwest for Bulgaria. Relations with Serbians and Hungarians were permanently settled in order to strengthen the back areas of the country before the coming decisive clash with Byzantium that would determine the survival of Bulgarian kingdom. It began soon: in 1000 a vast Byzantine army faced the Bulgarians. Different military groups advanced towards the Bulgarian kingdom from different directions – from Misia to Pelopones. In response the army of Tsar Samuil headed towards Thrace. The big battle between the kingdom and the empire started at the beginning of the 11th century. It remains in the chronicles marked by the images of two resolute and energetic men who were the leaders from both sides.

Samuil's typical tenacity in pursuing his life goal – the restoration of Bulgarian might – aroused respect among the Byzantines. "That military, miraculously active man who looked at



the rest with detest” was a skillful strategist. Over time his army managed to conquer the strongest Byzantine armies and weathered severe battles in the Arabian desert. Samuil himself led his soldiers in the battles all over the territories of the Balkan Peninsula. The Byzantines from Thrace to Peloponesus faced his iron will. The latter crushed all efforts to deprive him of his power. Without any hesitation he sacrificed the life of his own brother, Aaron, when the latter was accused of collaborating with the Byzantines. Despite the fact that Basil II considered Samuil an imposer and a rebel, he also considered him to be one of the most dignified opponents throughout his rule.

When Basil II started his march against the Bulgarians he had learned a lot from the disputes for the throne and knew already the price of power. Having managed finally to establish himself as an emperor, and covered with glory resulting from his victories against the Arabs, Basil had the unreserved support of the army because, even though morose in character, he was an excellent warrior. Even more solidly behind him stood the Constantinople church that had just managed, with his active help, to baptize the Kiev Knyaz, Vladimir (988). The political dream of Basil – to restore the Justinian Empire – required as well restoring the Byzantine power over the Balkans.

In any case the battle with the Bulgarians was inevitable. For Byzantine the issues around the Bulgarian throne were concluded at the time of Joan Tzimisches. The regalia of the Bulgarian tsar were kept in Constantinople. Therefore the actions of

Samuil could not be interpreted by the Byzantine emperor as anything else but a rebellion against order and God.

The decisive part of the big battle occurred in the valley of the Struma river. On July 29, 1014 by the village of Klyuch the Bulgarians suffered an unbelievable defeat. Basil punished the captured soldiers of Samuil’s army as rebels, blinding them. According to the chronicles Samuil’s prostration at the sight of his blinded soldiers was so strong that it caused his death.

The death of Samuil predetermined the end of the conflict. A group among the Bulgarian aristocracy was formed who were inclined to a compromise. It got stronger in influence despite the existence of a group that defended the Bulgarian independence. The chronicles keep the names of the glorious boyars, Ivats, Nikulitsa from Servia, Dragshan from Voden, and Krakra from Pernik. The end came in 1018 when the gates of the last capital of Bulgaria were open for Basil II to solemnly enter Ohrid. He had already proudly pronounced himself to be the “Bulgarslayer”.

The emperor took all the members of Samuil’s family to Constantinople. Its citizens went out in the streets to meet the victorious Bulgarslayer with his strange “plunder”. Constantinople was jubilant. The crucial victory over the Bulgarians was celebrated with a solemn liturgy in the Saint Sophia church.

In less than a century the emperors-warriors collected in the New Rome a number of proofs of the Empire’s might and its sacred mission in the Christian world.

## CHECK-UP

1. Describe the situation in Europe at the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th centuries.
2. List some reasons for the rapid victories of Knyaz Svyatoslav over the Bulgarians.
3. Why did the Bulgarian state tradition remain alive in the western Bulgarian lands?
4. Give reasons on the Byzantine point of view for their striving to conquer Bulgaria.



## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **Basil II, who called himself the Bulgarslayer**

Basil II (976-1025) came to the throne at the age of 18 and this act was accompanied by insurrections. After having dealt with opponents inside the Empire, Basil directed his attacks towards Bulgaria. His intention to organize a march towards the Bulgarians in 986 and lead the armies himself were opposed by the military commanders and the court officials. According to tradition the place of the emperor was in the sacred palace and not on the battlefield. The failure of this first march did not hide the fact that against the Bulgarians stood an individual with extraordinary energy. For such an individual a failure was mainly a stimulus for further energy and effort.

Immediately after the defeat at the "Bulgarian gorge" (the pass, Trajan gate) a new insurrection against the emperor arose in Constantinople and it soon grew to an unheard-of size. All of Asia Minor stood behind the famous military commander, Varda Phocas, worthy successor of a clan that had given to Byzantium many famous military commanders and an emperor. In the summer of 987 Varda Phocas pronounced himself emperor and some months later his armies besieged Constantinople. Only a man like Basil could stand such a pressure. During a night at the very beginning of 988 he himself lead a group of 6000 people in an unexpected attack against the camp of Phocas. The opponent was completely smashed and had to withdraw back to Asia Minor.

In a couple of months the two opponents faced each other again. In the middle of the battle the usurper tried to get to Basil and settle the dispute between them forever through a battle. It was then that his soldiers saw him leave

the battlefield most unexpectedly. Untouched by the enemy's weapon, Phocas fell on his knees and died; terrified, his followers gave up.

Later on the Byzantines told that a servant bribed by Basil had given poison to Phocas. True or false, this story testified that Basil was a man capable of using any weapons on his way of achieving his goal. His extraordinary courage went hand in hand with his extraordinary self-determination.

Both the contemporaries of Basil II and the historians were unanimous that at his time Byzantium was ruled by an extraordinary individual. In the 11th century Michail Psell wrote that the emperor "...used to subordinate even the seasons to the goal he was aiming at during his expeditions...he was an 'iron' man... He always managed to reign his feelings as adequate for a Roman emperor. He knew in details the military science... He took his decisions alone as if led by God himself." Eight centuries later the French historian, Gustav Schumberge, described Basil II in almost the same way: "This really remarkable ruler was maybe one of the most firm and obstinate men in history. Amazing was the patience with which during all his long life and even after his great defeats at the beginning, he was chasing his plan to eliminate the Bulgarian kingdom. Finally after 40 years of battles, after rivers of blood and extreme cruelties, when already an old man, he saw the goal of his constant aspirations achieved. That emperor with a cruel and hard heart, adored by the clergy and the warriors, but hated by the Byzantine aristocracy; that emperor who lived as a monk, in ascetic restraint, far from any woman never had a greater love than the one to his Empire."



## 20

## A DISINTEGRATED EUROPE: THE GREAT SCHISM\* OF 1054

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### **A** What divided Europe in the middle of the 11th century

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In July 1054 something happened that did not much impress people at that time. The Patriarch of Constantinople and the Pope of Rome exchanged anathemas\*. The reason for this serial schism between the two big Christian centres was insignificant. According to the Roman church the consecrated bread had to be made of dough without yeast and according to the Constantinople church, with yeast. That difference in the ritual had existed long before it became the object of dispute.

The results of the schism in the 11th century became increasingly important for the Christian world. They indicated that the essence of the dispute was much deeper than its cause. The two Churches found reasons for their firm opinions because of their development during the last two centuries. The historical development of the Eastern and the Western world during the 9th-11th centuries had added to the self-confidence of the Roman Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople new arguments in favour of their claims for power over the Christian world.

When the Patriarch haughtily accused the Pope of fallibility in faith, he had on his side the huge Byzantine Empire. It stretched from the Euphrates river

to the Danube and from Armenia to Southern Italy, governed by a complicated administrative body. The communication network from Roman times had been reestablished. Emperor Basil II had a full treasury, an army of 200,000 warriors, and a strong centralized power; the will of Byzantine meant a lot both in the Middle East and in Europe. In 1054 the Patriarch expected that Rome would listen to him too.

However, during the last two centuries, Rome had gained the same experience. During that time the Pope had managed to impose himself as the only spiritual head of the Christian West. In the centre of papal policy was the concept that the Roman church had juridical authority over the whole Christian world, which the Pope had received from Saint Peter himself. That is why Rome considered that it was their right to define what was a sin and what was not.

### **B** The history of the minority chosen: the people from the North

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In the middle of the 9th century the general warming up of the climate resulted in a demographic boom among the North German tribes inhabiting the Scandinavian peninsula. In their land there were no conditions for agriculture and besides that their main occupation,



fishing, could hardly feed them at that time. All that resulted in an expansion which stunned Europe throughout two whole centuries. The most active part of the Scandinavian population took part in raids to the continent, usually through military groups lead by a *konung* (a military leader) rather than groups of tribes. Therefore the Scandinavians became famous in Europe as "Normans" ("people from the North") or "Vikings" and not with their tribal names: Danes, Swedes, Norwegians.

The road of the Normans to the East went through the Baltic Sea, along the Dnieper to the Black Sea and Constantinople, or via the Caspian Sea to the vast wealth of the Arab caliphate. Historians were aware of the close cooperation between that Eastern branch of the Scandinavian tribes (the Swedes) and the Slavs in northeastern Europe. In the middle of the 9th century these Scandinavians, called in the chronicles "Varangians" or "Russians", found their states: the Novgorod and the Kiev principalities (i.e. in what is now Russia and Ukraine). The sparse Scandinavian ethnic element in the newly established principalities would gradually merge into the vast mass of Eastern Slavs. However, the Scandinavian name "Russians" remained as a reminder of the beginning of the state. At the end of the 9th century the two principalities united under the rule of Prince (Knyaz) Oleg. This Kievan Russia became the leading political force in Eastern Europe in the middle of the 9th century. The marriage of one of the rulers of Kiev, Prince Vladimir, with a Byzantine princess was in recognition of this.

The devastating attacks of the Western Scandinavian tribes were described in details by the Western chroniclers. The Danes and the Norwegians who conquered England, Iceland, Greenland and the Atlantic coast of France earned the name, "the horror of

the Western coasts." Their attacks were rapid, and the ensuing devastation, unheard of. Extremely stunning for Western Europe was their custom of killing human beings as a sacrifice to their barbarian gods. "The Norsemen" were hard to understand for Western peoples, who attributed their success in many cases to magical spells of their priests, the horrid dragons on the bows of their ships, (*drakhars*) and their magic script (*runes*).

In the 10th century the Norsemen invaded along the Seine, reaching Paris and sieging it four times. The French king agreed to pay tax and let them inhabit the northern part of France, still called Normandy. Fast Christianization had softened their barbarian temper. Medieval European poetry borrowed from their long specific songs in which "the Normans" described their heroes' deeds. Western painting adopted from them a specific decorative style inspired by the ancient mythology of the North, too.

The invasions of the Normans reached the southernmost parts of Western Europe. In the 11th century Norman domination in Southern Italy and Sicily began. They were found on lands taken away from the Arabs and from the Byzantine Empire.

Forced to survive and despite their small number, the Normans paid a special attention to the personal connection of each warrior with the *konung*. It was sealed with an oath of allegiance and acceptance of mutual obligations. The strength of the personal connection held Norman society together. Small communities of closely interconnected people proved extremely sustainable in the uncertain time of frequent invasions during the 10th-11th centuries. The new principle of social relationships gradually began to define the image of medieval Western society.



## **C Society based on personal connection**

The Normans way of ensuring survival was not unfamiliar to the Western world. The wave of invasions did not leave any single part untouched. Social connections were seriously broken. As Western society lacked a strong centralised power, the local body of authority had to take the responsibility of mobilizing all powers. In order to oppose the invaders they created a specific military organization which corresponded to the needs of the constant military conflicts. Its sustainability was guaranteed by personal connections among those doing the defending.

The process mentioned above was followed more clearly in southern Europe. In the middle of the 9th century, Arabs that had been dislodged to the West by Byzantium mounted constant raids. Having managed to conquer the big Mediterranean islands – Sicily, Corsica and Crete – the Arabs converted them into bases for their raids in southern France, Spain and Italy. One of the reasons to divide the Frankish Empire in the middle of the 9th century was the need to more securely organize the defense of southern districts affected by the Arab attacks.

The constant fear of Arab raids in the densely populated European lands made more and more people seek the defense of those who had fortresses and means to oppose the invaders. These free people became “vassals”\* of their protector, the “seignior” (“lord”). The strongest seigniors were the counts and the dukes\* from the Carolingian time. They began to collect taxes for themselves, administer justice, and organize “people for war” in the territories they protected.

The vassals were warriors of the lords. Sometimes they lived in the castle of the lord or they received a “feud” (“fief”), a special gift that allowed them

to get well armed. The feud was most often a piece of land – a main source of means. It could also be the right to collect taxes over a certain craft. Or it could be the armament itself that the vassal got from his lord: armour, a horse, and arms.

The feud gave the name to the social system established during the 10th-12th centuries: “feudalism.” During the 11th century the Western world began to disintegrate into small worlds, dedicated mainly to its defense. Thus, as a result of hostile raids a new type of social relations was established, which later became the basis of medieval West European civilization.

## **D The fate of the German world (mid-10th – mid-11th centuries)**

The disintegration of the medieval West into small feudal communities made possible the existence of political alliance such as Charles the Great’s Empire. The only way to have them united was to have power over them. In the Western world it was the Germans who were the last to achieve this.

The catalyst that unified the German world was the new invaders from the Eastern steppes, the Magyars (the Hungarians), who rapidly raided Central Europe at the end of the 9th century. At the very beginning of the 10th century they destroyed the Great Moravian principality and conquered steadily the steppes in Panonia. From there they plundered in the neighbouring German duchies: Saxony, Franconia, Schwabia, and Bavaria. The Hungarian marches reached Paris and Southern Italy but the main attack was on the German lands.

The need to adequately oppose the new invaders united the German world around Saxony. The Saxon dukes who had the greatest number of victo-



ries over the Hungarians became kings of Germany. In 955 by the River Lech the united German forces lead by King Otto I (936-973) crushingly defeated the Hungarians.

That important victory awakened the memory of the imperial glory of the Carolingians, and nourished the idea shared by all Otonians that the imperial dignity was due to military victories and the support of the army; the Pope's blessing simply admitted it. That view was the source of numerous conflicts between the Germans and the Pope. However, in the middle of the 10th century, there was something else more important: Rome was considered the centre of the Western world. The Pope's blessing meant that the blessed gains authority in reference to the rest of the Western rulers.

In 962, in Rome the Pope crowned Otto I as Emperor of the Roman Empire. The idea of a union between the Empire and the papacy was reestablished. Together with it was reanimated the old idea of the Empire's mission as baptizer of the pagans. Otto I established special missionary centres to baptize the Scandinavians in the North and the Baltic Slavs in the East, in the lands between the Oder and the Elbe (nowadays Germany). While the missions in the North brought a lot of success and glory for the Empire, the missions among the Slavs met strong opposition in the form of military force.

This policy in the East made Otto I face a serious problem: what should the policy of the Empire be towards the Western Slavs, who were mainly Christians? At the end of the 9th century in Central Europe, the Poles and the Czechs already existed as strong states. As far as the church was concerned they were related to the German church. However, the policy of Otto towards the pagan Slavs in the lands between the Oder and the Elbe made the rulers of the Poles and the Czechs judge their political autonomy endangered. Therefore they strongly op-

posed Otto I. Thus, his policy in the East involved the Christian Empire in long and fruitless wars between the Slavs and cast doubt over its ability to unite the whole Western Christian world.

The third representative of the Ottonian dynasty finally resolved the impasse. Otto II (938-1002) imposed his confessor, Sylvester, on the Pope's throne in Rome. The united efforts of both of them took the Otton Empire to its greatest glamour. Discontent with Otto's policy in the North was quieted down after Pope Silvester II decided to give independence of the local churches under the authority of Rome. In 1000 the Poles got their archbishop in Gnjeczno, and in 1001 the Hungarians also got their archbishop in Estergom.

Thus, at the very end of his rule Otto III seemed to get closer to his dream of a universal empire uniting all independent Christian states under the supreme power of the Emperor and the Pope. Relations between Rome and the German emperors would soon grow less stable than they were at the time of Otto III and Pope Silvester II. The fact that the Polish and the Hungarian local churches were subordinated to Rome and not to the German bishop in Mainz would become crucial. However, for a short period at the beginning of the 11th century it seemed possible that a majority of small isolated worlds constituting the Western one could be connected and subordinated to a single power: the power of the German emperors supported by Rome.

## **E** Two major victories

At a festive ceremony in 988 the Russian prince, Vladimir, together with his close associates, accepted Christianity from Byzantium. The East Orthodox world enlisted for its cause a serious cultural force: Kievan Russia. Through



it the fate of Eastern Europe and Eastern Slavs was forever connected with Christian civilization. After the conversion of the Russians under the guidance of the Constantinople Patriarch, three quarters of the Slavs in Europe were already united.

Some years later, in 1001, the Hungarians accepted Christianity from Rome. The Pope got Pannonia back under his spiritual authority, together with the new Christians in it.

Thus at the beginning of the 11th century almost all of Europe was Christianized. The last two major victories of Christianity during that time gave to both the Pope in Rome and to the Patriarch in Constantinople a strong argument in their dispute of who stood higher in the Christian world. Nobody had noticed yet that the differences between the Western and the Eastern Christian worlds had become so big that the very fact whether they were part of the same Church became problematic.

### **CHECK UP:**

- 1. What was the prime source of rivalry between the Eastern and the Western Church during the 11th century?*
- 2. What differentiated the Normans from the previous barbarian invaders in Europe?*
- 3. Describe the new type of social system that got established during the time of the barbarian invasions during the 10th-11th centuries?*
- 4. List the reasons for the unification of the German world under the guidance of the Saxon kings. What was the role of the Magyars and the Slavs in that process?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **Constantinople, the hot summer of 1054**

In the 1050s the Byzantine Empire had a strong rival for its lands in Southern Italy: the Normans in Sicily. The Emperor needed the Pope's support to eliminate his rival, and was ready to do nearly anything to get it. People said that he was even ready to part eparchies from the diocese of the Patriarch in order to give them to the Pope.

The intentions of the Emperor were looked upon by the Patriarchy of Constantinople as a capitulation to Rome and its claims for prior authority among all churches. A great number of books were written aiming at proving by facts the fallibility of the custom tolerated by the "infallible" Roman Church in the use of bread with or without yeast, in the Saturday fasting, etc.

The appearance of these writings that claimed the fallibility of the Western Church provoked a reply from Rome. In this reply Pope Leo IX (1049-1054) was trying to interfere in the affairs of the Constantinople Patriarchy in an unprecedented way. Here are excerpts from it: "...Nobody can deny that the way the hinges govern the whole door so does Peter and his successors regulate the order and the structure of the whole Church. And the way the hinges keep the door moving yet without moving themselves so does Peter and his successors have the right to freely judge any Church and no one is to be outraged with this because the supreme culprit is to be judged by nobody".



Given this language addressed to the Patriarchy, it was no wonder that in the summer of 1054 when new papal legates\* arrived in Constantinople, the Patriarch did not participate in the official welcome arranged by the Emperor. The Emperor was ready to do anything to secure the support of the Pope. However it was beyond his abilities to do the only thing that they wanted: to make the Patriarch meet them.

The Patriarch in Constantinople at that time was Michael Kerularius (1043-1058), a striking figure in the long line of Byzantine Patriarchs. He was very passionate at his youth but later was forced to become a monk and devote himself wholly to the Church. However, neither monk's cassock nor, later, the patriarch's mantle managed to calm down his severe and powerful temperament. The papal legates would be the last that Kerularius would discuss anything with. They all supported the idea of a strong papal power around which was built a separate movement in the Burgundy abbey of Cluny, in Southern France. The only dignified behaviour was proud silence, and that was what the legates faced any time they wanted to be received by Kerularius.

On the fifth week they became impatient and in order to provoke the Emperor's intervention, they acted with unprecedented audacity. On July 16, 1054 the cardinals\* entered the Saint Sofia church which was crowded with people and put on the altar a special papal bull\* which excommunicated Patriarch Michael Kerularius and his followers from the Church. That was the moment when the legates learned that little was known in Cluny about the Eastern Church. The rebellion in Constantinople resulting from the news about the papal bull shattered the throne of the Emperor himself. He had to give up his intention of close contacts with the Roman Church. On July 20, 1054, a special Church meeting was convened that excommunicated the papal legates, and the papal bull was burned in the Emperor's presence. Thus ended one of the most dramatic events in the Church's history. The Christian world was still to suffer more dramatic consequences that would transform the differences in the churches into religious hate at the time of crusaders' marches from the end of the 11th century.

## WORKSHOP:

### **The world is divided into two**

**Task No.1:** Check what you have learned. Choose the level you want to try:

#### **Satisfactory**

1. List the names of three Byzantine emperors closely related to the Bulgarian history.
2. Name the year of the following events:
  - a) the conversion of Bulgarians to Christianity;
  - b) the coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor;

- c) the victory of Tsar Simeon by the Acheloi.
3. Describe the foundation of the centralized Bulgarian khanate at the time of the Kroum dynasty rulers. In your answer keep in mind their activity in the areas of legislation, administration, and building.



*(If you haven't managed to answer the questions above and this is not the first time this happens, all our warnings have been in vain. If you have answered them though, congratulations! You have just got a 3 - the most difficult mark to get.)*

### **Good**

1. What was the name of the capital of:
  - the Franconian empire at the time of Charlemagne;
  - Bulgaria at the time of Khan Boris;
  - the Arab Khaliphate at the time of the Abasides.
2. What is the event related with the

following years: 855 988 1018

3. How did Rome and Constantinople try to convert the Slavonic world to the Christian religion? In your answer keep in mind the following: the birth and the essence of the German-Slav conflict; the history of the Slav-Byzantine conflict; the means used by the two Church centres.

*(If you have answered the questions above, your work during the term will be marked with a 4. A little more is needed, though, to convince you that history is an enjoyable subject and can help you learn a lot about our world's both past and present.)*

### **Excellent**

1. Which of the individuals listed below are contemporaries of Khan Presian (836-852)
  - a) Louis the Pious;
  - b) Nicephorus I;
  - c) Charlemagne;
  - d) Methodius;

e) Rostislav.

2. What is the event related to the following years: 846 870 955.
3. Describe the social system in Western Europe having in mind the following: the conditions of founding; the new type of social relations; the feudal society.

*(If this is not the first time you succeed in answering the most difficult questions, your knowledge in the history of our world during the early Middle Ages is very sound and consistent. You will get an excellent mark as well as the satisfaction of having extended your general knowledge.)*

**Task No.2:** Answer in writing to the following question:

What were the features of the division between Eastern and Western Europe during the 10th-11th centuries?

In your answer you could use the following plan:

- \* the clash of interests of the two Christian centres – Rome and Constantinople and their fight for supremacy;
- \* the states representing the order in the East and the West;
- \* the relationship between the ruler and the Church;
- \* the specific features of the societies formed in the East and the West;
- \* the formal act of the split.



## 21

## THE END OF THE FIRST MILLENIUM

**A** The Great Fear

At the end of the 10th century the European West was still living with the terror from the barbarians invasions. The signs of plunder from Normans, Arabs, and Hungarians kept the Christians on the continent insecure. Alone in a world full of blood and menace, medieval men had no other alternative but to feel fear. The only hope at these circumstances was the protection of God. Everybody was excited about the forthcoming Second Coming\* depicted in their imagination in horrid pictures, with many details transferred from daily life. The Antichrist\* who, as per the Bible, was to appear on the eve of Doomsday in order to sweep Christians to eternal destruction, was associated at that time with the horrible image of the Devil. That mythological character was diligently depicted in chronicles, miniatures, wall paintings, and prayers. Mundane concerns lost any meaning in front of the fear of the almighty Devil. At the end of the 10th century more and more people left their everyday activities and made their way to monasteries. They were lead by the idea of being involved in devout deeds at the time of the world's end, i.e. in 1000.

Even when 1000 was over without any Last Judgment, the fear that had existed for years remained. People gradually got back to their everyday problems but mostly they kept seeking protection and security.

At that time Western Europe abounded in woods, marshes, and waste land. Among them were scattered small safe "islands": cities, castles, and monasteries. Woods were cut off by fields and natural pastures. Over the lands that were poorly cultivated by a wooden plough, grew small vineyards of the bishop and the lord, a lot of oats for the soldiers' horses, and insufficient wheat, the main food of the peasants. Even after an abundant year the harvest did not exceed three grains per every one sown. Therefore the majority of people during the 10th-11th centuries constantly lived on the verge of poverty.

The only other place to make one's living was the woodland. The medieval Christians in the West highly respected the woodland, a refuge for anybody who for any reason was beyond the regular world: hermits, robbers, tramps, errant knights. The woodland was densely populated with real and unreal dangers: predatory animals, elves, nymphs, evil magicians, and monsters. Therefore crossing the woodland was a real hardship. It was possible only for those that are under the protection of arms or God's blessing, i.e. knights and monks.

Despite their fears, people in the 11th century were still strongly dependent on woodland. It was the source of heat in winter and their basic building material. It gave honey (sugar was not known yet) and most of the fruit, game, and pasturage for their small herds of sheep and goats.



## **B** A belligerent world: the disintegrated west

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The Medieval West remained for a long time a totality of towns, castles, and fortresses mainly concerned with their own defense. A small number of people lived there, 30-40 times less than nowadays. The barbarian raids during the 9th-10th centuries destroyed political unity in these lands. No ruler could stretch his power far from his place of habitation. Rule changed according to their insecure life. People obeyed the one whose armour was closer to them. War was a daily round and the most important person in it was the lord of the fortress (the castellan). The existence of the fortress with its contingent of professional warriors was a matter of survival for the whole vicinity. It was taken for granted that in exchange for protection, the warriors got fed and supported by the unarmed local inhabitants. Thus the obligations that could not be fulfilled by the kingdom or the empire were spread among the local noblemen. Along with the responsibilities was distributed the income that used to go to the treasury of the kingdom. For a certain period of time the king's power was simply a past reminiscence, a craving for the time of order and security.

On the eve of the 11th century the map of Western Europe was a mosaic of small worlds. The Scandinavian kingdoms – Denmark, Sweden, and Norway – were mostly interested in their own problems. The Normans' expansion to the continent had deprived them of their best men. The battle with the severe northern life consumed all their energy.

To the South, on the Pyrenean peninsula the Arab raids had driven the Christian kingdoms of Leon, Castile, and Navarre into the mountains of Northern Spain. For five centuries (the 11th-the 15th) they devoted their efforts to winning the peninsula back from the Arabs. The Carolingian dynasty in the West Frankish

kingdom declined. After the death of its last representative a council of mighty and autonomous nobles pronounced Hugo Capet (987-996) successor. He was the descendent of a glorious family but his lands around Paris were too small and his ability to dictate his policy to the local nobles, too limited. While still on the throne he insisted that his son, Robert II, be crowned. He thus ensured the succession to the throne but it also indicated the insecurity of the king's power at the time of the first Capetians.

Only in the Otto Roman Empire's territory did the idea of the West Christian world's political unity still exist. During the 11th century their power stretched over vast territories in mid-Europe: from the Northern Sea to Italy. The belligerent German North and the civilized Italian South were united by the authority of these incredible emperors who managed to convert even the church bishops into their ministers. However, about the middle of the 11th century their aspirations clashed with the might of a new papacy. All emperors after Otto III (983-1002) would be forced to reign under the shadow of rivalry with the popes.

## **C** The awakening: Roman art

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In the 11th century the undernourished, unsafe, and disunited European West started as if to awake. The fear of God, enemies, and death still ruled peoples' conscience but it now prompted action. An intense building of churches and castles began. People built solidly and stably, using stone for a long time.

Later on specialists called the architecture of the 11th-12th centuries "Romanesque," i.e. inspired by Roman style but different from it. Romanesque buildings were solid, built of heavy stone blocks no matter their function; they looked like fortresses. Though a bit



clumsy they emanated something that was highly appreciated at the time: security.

The superb expression of Romanesque style was to be seen in the churches – the majority of buildings erected during the 11th-12th centuries. Their bleak facades were gradually covered with a dense decoration of reliefs. Windows as a rule were a rarity and the interior was in deep semi-darkness. It obscured part of the charm of the rich floral decoration but in exchange, the suggestion of the images was increased by the candle lights. The plots were inspired by the Bible but among them there were many distorted images, fairy animals, and monsters. The decoration, as everything else, emanated the severe grandeur of its time. The wooden roof which burned easily and frequently was changed for a stone vault. Its weight brought into existence inside columns and walls fortified by counterfores\* from outside. The acoustics were excellent and enabled the whole beauty of the Gregorian chant during divine services to be appreciated.

For the needs of the monasteries Romanesque architecture gave birth to some public buildings: hospitals, inns, workshops. Fortresses were gradually reconstructed. The old wooden fort was first changed for a stone wall, and later on the inner yard and the lord's habitat were separated from the farm buildings. Finally, houses were made of stone or at least stone foundations.

The ensuing building industry remained the only industry in medieval times. It was an outward expression of deep change in the Western world. Because of the needs in building, the production of stone and iron increased; and equipment for transportation and lifting of heavier weight was improved. An increase and diversity of iron instruments took place and that change favourably combined with a climatic warming across Europe. Technical and natural prerequisites made possible the increase of arable land.



## Colonization

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The warming climate made the northern parts of the continent accessible for inhabitation. In the 11th century when medieval man faced that vast unploughed land he was much better equipped than his predecessors, and he used many metal tools. The new iron plough enabled deeper cultivation and thus harvest was considerably increased. This was also the result of the variety of crops – corns or leguminous that were more nutritious and rich in proteins. Hungry years became a rarity. People fed better and the length of human life increased. The population of Europe increased which meant more labour for the building industry and new agricultural land.

Economic prosperity meant security as well. The favourable technical and natural conditions were only one side of the process. The other one was the people and their social interrelations since the success during the 11th-12th centuries resulted from the mutual efforts of lords and peasants. The increase of lands for the lords gave them more funds and enabled them to have more vassals, who were given feuds. The responsibilities of the peasants and craftsmen, whose labour kept all the warriors, increased. The former strongly felt that they were protected not only from hostile attacks but also from robbers and burglars, and other forms of injustice.

During that period the weak king's power and the interrelation of vassal relations made some think anarchy close at hand. It often happened that one and the same local feudal was a vassal to several lords, and it was difficult for him to fulfill his obligations if the interests of the lords differed. Historians recorded wars among aristocrats, usurpation of the church wealth, and violence of some lords over their dependents. Yet feudal society



during the 11th- 12th centuries had its specific order. The solidarity of the ruling group was nourished by the pledge of allegiance, hereditary unions, and their pride before the subordinate village population. Added to all that was the church

authority offering the warriors a knight model of behaviour. It expressed precisely the church view of society consisting of three strata: the people who prayed, the people who fought, and the people who worked.

### **CHECK UP:**

- 1. How did the barbarian attacks during the 12th century influence the ideas of medieval people in the West?*
- 2. List the features of Romanesque art and the reasons for imposing that style.*
- 3. What were the prerequisites for the economic rise in the Western world during the 11th century?*
- 4. Did feudal society change during the 11th – 12th century? List your arguments.*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Castle and its Heroes**

Most of the fortresses that existed in the West at the time of the first barbarian invasions during the 9th – 10th centuries dated back to Carolingian times. Their primary purpose, protecting boundaries, grew more important when the greater part of Western Europe was a boundary and there were severe battles for its protection. The whole population of the district was sheltered behind the walls of the fortress in case of any calamity. However, for a certain group of people the fortress was a permanent home: these were the warriors and their lord. It was at that time that fortresses turned into castles.

Archaeologists determined that in the towers intended for inhabitation there were no clear signs of their function. There were no separate bedrooms, living rooms, or rooms for servants: everything corresponding to our stereotype of a castle. This was due to the fact that during the 10th-11th centuries people's lives

in them were far from the daily pleasures aristocrats indulged in at other times. The main function of the vast rooms during the 10th-11th centuries was to accommodate all the inhabitants for meals or rest. At night man easily became prey to evil forces, and it was better to have company at that time. That is why people used to sleep together on an armful of straw covered with their cloaks that they wore while riding during the day.

For the lord and his vassals, collective life was a necessity since survival was possible only through unity. Whoever left the group or his family turned into a lonely person. He became an object of suspicion or admiration because to be able to live thus meant he possessed an extraordinary force, good or evil, but still bigger than that of others. Stories about such people excited the inhabitants of the castle gathered round the fireplace during the long cold winter nights. It is hard to imagine



such a group gathered round the live fire in a room that had no chimney and instead of windows, had embrasures. However, we know what they talked about and to a certain extent what they dreamed about.

We get these pictures from surviving court literature. It appeared in the middle of the 12th century when some of the stories that had been circulating by mouth around Europe for a long time were written down. The voluminous knight novels put together real and legendary characters in order to most convincingly reveal the knightly ideal: brave, gallant and kind.

One of the favourite characters of the knight novels was King Arthur. The imagination of the severe medieval people had transformed this real British ruler from the 5th – 6th centuries into a hero with innumerable deeds of valour. During the 11th century people throughout Europe listened to the legends telling how he became a mighty ruler of all Britain thanks to the force of the magic sword Excalibur, found by him with the help of

Merlin the magician. What the glorious king searched for all through his life was the Holy Grail, the sacred bowl that Jesus and the apostles drank wine from at the time of the Last Supper. This search made king Arthur himself, together with his closest twelve knights from the Round Table, face a chain of severe trials because the sacred Grail could be taken only by an infallible man.

The knight ideal was born resulting from the needs of an epoch that gave few possibilities for an individual performance of an individual. Even obsessed by fear the medieval European did not leave his craving for an enchanting example of the knight – a person who sought deeds of valour; who strained every nerve to get a personal award. For ages the knight novels became the main handbook in ethics and inspired the efforts of many people forced to live collectively but craving for the individual development of a person who wanted more from himself.

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

# 22

### BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE: THE KNIGHT'S WORLD



#### The fruits of fear

The political disorder and fear during the 10th century increased immensely the importance of the medieval

fortress. It became an embodiment of collective security and the only source of real power for everybody living around it. One could easily follow the conquering of Spain by the Muslims at that time simply by studying the castles. The Christian invasion created its own places



of fortification used as foundations for subsequent operations in the south. Soon the whole plain of Spain was dotted with fortresses, thus giving it its name: Castile (from castilla, Sp. for "castle").

The fortresses alone were not enough to guarantee security. Warriors were needed as well – people skillful in warfare. In the 11th century that meant heavy armament and horses, which required money. Men with enough money provided the latter on their own. The rest could get this chance if they pledged allegiance to a lord. In exchange, he offered them a feud – a piece of his land – armament, and the right to collect a certain tax on his lands. The pledge of allegiance was personal and oral. At that time solemnly sworn words, shaking hands, and a kiss between the lord and his vassal was a complete guarantee for keeping the pledge. The relations created in this way were almost familial. The address word, "señor" (literally meaning "senior"), expressed simultaneously the soldier's fear of and confidence in the commander. A peculiar warrior's tenderness was seen in the address word, "vassal", used by the lord to his loyal people. These indicated friendly relationships created by the common social experience. War brought these people closer and made them live next to each other sharing dangers, and thus strengthened their spirit of community. Social distinctions (i.e. in nobility and property) disappeared before the prestige of the soldier's profession. Soldiers were highly appreciated in Western society which was forced to live in the state of a permanent war.

The warrior's community, strengthened by personal relations, was the foundation of the increasing power of local feudals. As time went by elements of public authority were added to their military functions. The lord created laws, collected taxes, settled disputes on the territory of his lands, and, in some cases, even minted his own coins. His fortress became the

centre of a small world that was well organized and protected, and was inherited by his first-born son or sold as land. In any case the lord responsible to no one. Also, in warfare the lord was equally free to lead his soldiers against the infidel Muslims, a neighbour, or his king – and they had to follow him, as required by the oath.

## **B** The Right of the Stronger

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In the middle of the 11th century when Western Europe ended the barbarian attacks it became clear that there was a great amount of warrior power. Resulting from the complicated interrelations of vassal connections, a great part of that power could be concentrated in the hands of a single lord, to be used according to his personal ambitions. For some time states appeared and disappeared on the map of Europe or their boundaries changed beyond recognition.

In the middle of the 11th century a short war transformed the multitude of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms on the British Isles into a state governed by the Norman rulers. In 1066 William the Duke of Normandy with his army of 50,000 of the best knights in Normandy, Flanders, Poitou, and Burgundy landed on the English coast. At Hastings he defeated the British armies and victoriously marched into London, where he was pronounced a king.

A peculiar but very eloquent testimony to that fact is still in existence: the Bayeux Tapestry. On this 70m embroidery made by Norman women the predecessor of William, Edward the Confessor, can be seen. He is surrounded by clergymen and sitting on a throne resembling the one of Charlemagne: the picture of a devout and mighty Christian ruler. Next to him is the image of William who would become known in history as the "Conqueror." He is surrounded by knights and is on horseback instead of a



throne. He does not look devout or give any impression of divine power, yet power was on his side. And in the 11th century everything was decided by power. Thanks to it William, the vassal of the French king, could have the royal crown and many more lands than his lord.

At the same time another Norman, Robert Guiscard, created a state in southern Italy. Due to the strong army of Norman knights it survived for some time, opposing attacks by the Arabs, the Byzantine Empire, and the Pope.

William of Normandy and Robert Guiscard were only two of the mighty feudals who managed to achieve their ambitions, but during the 11th century there were many more like them. Not all, though, had William's chance yet most of them tried their luck. As a result there were constant local wars which ended more than one of the Barbarian invasions. The habit of using weapons to solve problems has been a tragic constant in the world. Some authority, accepted and renowned by all, might lessen this tendency, and at that time only the Church represented such an authority.

## **C** The brotherhood of “the people at war”

The society of professional soldiers developed their own rules to be absolutely maintained. The main pillars were discipline and personal loyalty: the main conditions for military success. Around them was built “a whole educational system” for acquiring the skills of a warrior. The knight's equipment weighed 30-50 kg and besides a defense armour, a helmet, and a shield, included a whole set of different arms: a lance, a sword, a dagger, an arrow or an arbalest\*. All these items were very expensive; they were worth about 45 cows or 16 mares. However, it was not that difficult to get hold of the equipment. If you could not buy it with your own money you

could get it from the lord. The difficulty was learning how to use it well and the first two decades of a future soldier's life were devoted to it. The preparation started at the age of 7 when a boy became a page\* at the court of a lord. At the age of 14 the page became a squire (i.e. an armour-bearer) and began to study the seven knight's arts: high riding, swimming, bow shooting, fighting, hunting, chess, and poetry. During these years he accompanied his mentor in battles and could practice what he had learned. If at the age of 21 the young man showed the qualities needed, he became full member of the warriors' brotherhood after a special ceremony.

If the newly dubbed knight was lucky to be the first born son, he went back to his father's castle that he would inherit one day. However, if he were a younger brother or not of a noble origin the young man had to look for a lord he would fight for, since his only possession was his military ability.

Thus the roads of Europe grew crowded with energetic, well-armed young men who hunted for a job or adventures – i.e., battles. Their main objective was to use their skills. It was almost of no importance what or whom they fought for or against.

The Church started a fight against the private wars which were detrimental to all. It began with the declaration of “God's peace” which forbade wars at the time of Easter Lent. The next step was the declaration of “God's armistice,” according to which the days granted for war were diminished to the first three of every week. However, that was not enough. The Church's objective was to direct the knights from destruction with swords to assistance to the poor. That is why it interfered into the orders of the closed warriors society. The most important rituals for knight dubbing started to be carried out under the sign of faith. Prior to getting his arms a knight had to fast and pray for two days as well as get a sacra-



ment. Before he had his armour he was washed and clothed in a white shirt as in baptism. After that he got his "sanctified" sword, very often from the hands of the local bishop, and pronounced an oath abounding in religious formulae.

As time passed Christian ethics became an integral part of knight's behaviour. Thus a big group formed who were convinced that it was not enough to

be strong and courageous unless you protected the poor and the weak from misfortune. The warrior's virtue was permanently connected with qualities such as honesty, justice, protection, which would benefit the whole society. The Church managed to transform "the brotherhood of the warriors" into an estate of "the people who make war" which followed its own mission important for all the Christians.

### **CHECK UP**

1. *Explain the essence of the relationship between the vassal and the lord.*
2. *How was the society of professional soldiers formed?*
3. *What were the consequences of imposing of "the right of the strong" on political life?*
4. *Why did the Church try to form the moral image of the free warriors and how was this achieved?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Rules of the War: the Knight's Tournament**

During the middle ages any wedding, victory, visit of a foreign nobleman, or remarkable event was an occasion to organize a knight tournament. When the Church began to tone down the knights' temper its influence spread also over that peculiar military event. By the end of the 12th century it was gradually transformed into a magnificent competition.

The tournament required a careful preliminary preparation. Special envoys of the lord who had decided to organize a tournament rode to all the neighbouring castles to announce its place, date, and the list of prizes for the winners. The news spread fast round the area including places as far away as two weeks by horse. The arrival of each participant was announced with a trumpet and shouts of his orderlies or pages. This is how the audience learned his name.

If a knight had come to participate in the tournament, not just to watch it, he had to go to the judges first and present evidence of his skills. His noble title was carefully checked after that and finally his coat of arms was put on a spear by the place designed for the tournament. In case the knight wanted to keep confidentiality the judges covered his coat of arms with a black cloak.

The selection of a rival was the signal for the start of the game. This was done by the knight's spear touching the rival's coat of arms. It was a challenge for a personal fight which the two knights plunged into accompanied by an incredible noise of drums, trumpets, and shouts of the audience. The winner was the one who knocked his rival off his horse.

A variety of tournament battles were known. In some of them the two knights, riding in full speed, had to unhook a metal



ring from a tall pillar. In others they had to knock to the ground a dummy dressed as an Arab with a spear and a knife attached to it. Another variety was the "arms parade" when the knight had to touch with the end of his spear the coat of arms of his rival, which was on a tall platform, overcoming another knight in front of it.

In all the cases the hardships were serious; the tournament lasted from sunrise till dark. It was only then that the judges announced the name of the winner who came to get his award, accompanied by the audience's excited shouts and the dames' tributes. The knight enjoyed his recognition and took a place of honour at

the festive table, enjoying the admiration of noble women. This actually was not a lesser hardship, since he had to be gallant, respectful, and pleasant – qualities that were an integral part of his knightly dignity.

If for the knight the tournament was a test, for the audience it was a festivity. For days on end the whole area felt the excitement of the forthcoming competition. On the day of the tournament all the surrounding towns and villages went to the place in high spirits. Tournaments were a golden time for jugglers, tradesmen, and bards – the medieval poets.

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

# 23

## THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE PAPACY



### The Empire and the feudal West

Together with the crown of Charlemagne the German emperors of the Holy Roman Empire inherited the idea of the political union of the Christian West. And indeed, in the middle of the 11th century in Western Europe there seemed to be no other power capable of carrying it out. The borders of the Empire encompassed considerable territories between the North Sea and Central Italy, thus bringing in a common political space Europe's North and South. Maintaining this unity became increasingly difficult at the time of the emperors of the Frankish dynasty (1104-1125),

when the whole Christian West was divided into a number of feudal worlds. Differences between German lands and Italy became even sharper.

To the German dukes the emperor of the Roman empire was an all-German ruler. Under the sign of the Cross he had to bring to a victorious end the struggle against the Slavs, the old enemies on the east. In the name of this struggle the German dukes strictly observed their duties and provided soldiers for the emperor's army. This, however, was the calculation of independent rulers who were paying for their increased possessions with their soldiers' blood. As early as the end of the 10th century the dukes of Franconia, Saxony, and Schwabia possessed considerable legislative, mili-



tary and administrative power over their lands, which was acknowledged by the emperor himself.

In 1024 the Duke of Franconia, the most powerful ruler in the German world, was elected German king and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. But the rulers of the new dynasty were soon confronted with the same problem as their predecessors: what were they in fact – German kings or Christian emperors?

The only authority capable of challenging the rule of local dukes was the Church. The episcopal sees in the German lands enjoyed the exceptional respect from the local population. Everybody – the common soldier, as well as the powerful duke – noted the words of the stern German bishops. In exchange to certain duties of state the bishops received aristocratic titles, landed property, and complete freedom of government. The emperors' sanction for all this was not only an expression of the sincerest piety but also of good calculation. Giving preference to the bishops, the emperor was thinking of actively opposing the German dukes' waywardness. From the moment bishops became state officials the emperor used his influence to promote to important ecclesiastical positions clerics obeying his will. Even a special rationale was worked out and according to it, the emperor too, could participate in the election of bishops. Thus the Western church was shaped into an instrument of government. Its dependency on secular power increased even as its riches were increasing. By the middle of the 11th century in their function of rulers of Italy the German emperors had the final say even in the papal election. Thus emerged the outlines of a major conflict which was to leave its imprint on the entire medieval West – the conflict between emperors and popes for political supremacy.

## **B** The Reform of Cluny: the Reformed Church and the Pope's authority

In the 11th century it became quite clear that the German emperors could hardly fulfil their mission of unifying the Christian world. Then the only other institution capable of doing this came to the fore. Citing its role as guardian of the very idea of state, the papacy revived the old debate of the supremacy of ecclesiastical over lay power. The majority of arguments were pretty well known: "the donation of Constantine," St Peter's unique position among the apostles, the unique position of the church he founded. There were new arguments as well, which displayed the characteristics of 11th century society itself. Thus the Pope was pictured as the supreme feudal lord upon earth who at the time of the Last Judgement would be held responsible before his heavenly Lord for the words of all believers. The emperor was just one of these and neither his power nor his responsibilities compared to the Pope's.

As the rivalry between the Papacy and emperors was in progress, a reformist movement within the Church, inaugurated by the monks of the Cluniac order gathered speed. This order was established at the monastery of Cluny (Burgundy, now in France), founded in 910 and immediately answerable to the Holy See. Because of its direct connections with Rome, the monastery successfully avoided many of the age's turmoils. Its alumni founded more than 300 monasteries in Germany, Italy, Spain and France, closely related to Cluny as well as one another both in spirituality and monastic rule. This conglomerate of monasteries, in fact, constituted the Order of Cluny.

In contrast to the clergy the monks of Cluny established a monastic ideal that included the basic chivalric



virtues of discipline and loyalty. They voiced serious reproaches against the bishops who not only accepted the secular investiture\* but also relapsed into the vicious temptations of secular life: war, marriage, trade, etc.

The Cluniac order levelled the heaviest charges against the emperors' intervention into episcopal election, to them an exclusively papal prerogative. The development of ecclesiastical law received a significant impetus from this tempestuous debate. The reformist movement started at Cluny formulated its goals with growing clarity. Their dominant goal was the Pope's independence from the emperors' rule. This goal required the renovation of the Church, including the cessation of simony (the buying of a clerical post) and an acceptance of compulsory celibacy for the clergy. These two measures drew pretty obvious boundaries between the clergy and other Christians and they completed the former's establishment as a separate social class. A whole system of theological views was worked out to establish its peculiar place in society, while the Papacy found support in a well-integrated society.

## **The Compromise: the long way from 'the investiture argument' to the Worms Concordate**

In 1077 an exhausting war for supremacy between the Papacy and the emperors began. It is recorded in history as the investitures argument between Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) and Emperor Henry IV (1056-1106). With his ascension to the papacy Gregory VII, an energetic monk of the Cluniac Order, posed the question of the pope's primacy. He insisted that the emperor should not have the right to take part in the election of bishops.

The Emperor Henry IV, who devoted a lot of effort to overcoming inner separatism in the empire and consolidating his power, regarded the new Pope's declarations as a threat to unity. He tried to depose the Pope's deposition by convening a council of the German bishops which was to proclaim him illegitimate. Gregory VII's reaction was quick and sudden as lightning. He excommunicated the Emperor and absolved his subjects from their oath to him. In the language of the age this meant that the Pope was deposing the Emperor. Gregory VII imposed an interdict (a prohibition of all church service) in the lands of the German emperor. The measure paralysed social life, as it largely depended on the Church. Thus it finally confirmed the pope's primacy. Henry IV kneeled and kissed the Pope's feet, so that the damnation of excommunication be taken off him. Despite his humiliation Henry IV refused to be reconciled to the Pope's claim that, as head of the Church, he should impose and depose emperors. In 1085 he crossed the Alps at the head of a powerful German army. Pope Gregory VII was compelled to seek refuge with the Normans of South Italy, where he died in exile. All this did not settle the argument over investitures. Gregory VII's extreme position was disapproved of by the bishops themselves, as the break with the Emperor could deprive the Church of its enormous possessions. The solution was found with the Worms Concordate of 1122, when both Henry IV and Gregory VII had long been dead. Its clauses declared everything possessed by the Church holy and inalienable. Appointed by God himself, the emperor was allotted the role of Defender of the Christians and of church property. His intervention was allowed only through certain rights of the laity assigned to the German bishops.

The Emperor sealed this document with his golden seal. He, too, sealed the disclaimer about the right to supremacy over the Christian West, as



well as the Pope's right to dominate over each and every earthly power. From this moment anybody who dared restore the former status quo, had also to bear the heavy cross of perjury.

## **D** The struggle for Italy

The last time the rivalry between popes and emperors was rekindled was during the Hohenstaufen dynasty's rule (1137-1268). Friedrich I Barbarossa (1152-1190) thanks to his military and diplomatic talents and at the cost of great concessions, succeeded in appeasing the most powerful German dukes. Having achieved this, he immediately directed his efforts to Italy. He took away the rights of disobedient Italian cities and broke the Concordate of Worms, restoring his power over German and Lombardian bishops.

An exchange of mutual accusations between Friedrich I and the Pope started. Each reproached the other of appropriating his God-given rights. The argument was five times interrupted by Friedrich Barbarossa's grand-scale military campaigns into Italy. His vehement

march to the south confronted him with the same old problem of what world – German or Christian – he wished to rule over. This problem was aggravated in Friedrich's time. Led by him, the German army had a serious chance to overwhelm the papacy, resulting in the consolidation of the emperor's power. Facing the danger of restrictions on their own independence, however, the German dukes withdrew their support and a hundred years after Canossa, Friedrich I had to suffer Henry IV's humiliation. In 1177 in Venice he kissed the Pope's feet to remove his excommunication. This could hardly, however, erase either his subjects' dissatisfaction with the devastating wars, or the Italian cities' adamant will to defend their freedom for a long time with every means at their disposal.

Friedrich Barbarossa's attempt to restore the imperial idea in the West only resuscitated the old dispute over whose power is more divine – the pope's or the emperor's. Politically, it amounted to an attempt to gain control over Italy which itself opposed the spirit of the empire. Friedrich I's heirs would be compelled to admit that the Empire was possible only as a German state, a Holy Roman Empire of the German nation.

### **CHECK UP**

1. Why did the German emperors fail in unifying the Christian West?
2. What was the essence of the reform of Cluny and how did it affect the reform of the Church?
3. What were the stages of the 'dispute over investitures'?
4. Give the major clauses of the Worms Concordate of 1122.



## FACES OF HISTORY :

### **Pope Gregory VII or the two swords of the Church of Rome**

Hildebrand, recorded in history as one of the most remarkable Roman popes was born in 1021 in a poor Tuscan family. Educated in Rome, this impressively energetic youth soon joined the circle of the Pope. After four years at Cluny Hildebrand went back to Rome to become archdean, i.e. administrator of the Pope's state.

Along with the energetic monk's entry into the structures of the pope's administration came the spirit of reform and the Cluniac idea that the two swords of power over Christians – secular and spiritual – were both given to the Church. Hildebrand was a most active participant in the Lateran Council of 1059, which made a huge step towards restoring the Church's complete independence of secular power. A new procedure for papal election was adopted. To this purpose a special college of prominent clerics – cardinals, appointed by the Pope – was founded. It comprised 52 cardinals of various ecclesiastical rank: 7 bishops, 28 priests and 17 deans. The election took place in a special closed room; hence the name of the procedure – conclave, i.e. behind closed doors.

The newly established procedure left no room for the will of the emperor, a will Rome had been reckoning with for centuries. Emperors could painfully feel this in the 1070s when by virtue of the new procedure Hildebrand himself was imposed as Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) on the Holy See. The first document issued by the papal chancellery proclaimed that '...no one should pass judgement on the Pope's decisions...'. Very soon the Christian West came to keenly experience the Pope's decisive acts.

In 1075 Gregory VII proclaimed null and void the investiture given to bishops by secular powers, to validate their rule over estates and landed property. Those who went on practicing it were threatened with excommunication and an interdict was imposed on their lands. To the emperor's attempt to declare him illegitimate, Pope Gregory answered publicly with a peculiar prayer to St Peter in the papal cathedral:

"King Henry, who rioted with an unheard-of pride against your Church, I depose of his rule over Germany and Italy and free of their oath (before him) all the Christians he is related to... and I excommunicate him". All bishops who had refused to obey the Papal order of investitures were also excommunicated. At this moment the Emperor could feel all the might of the "two swords" which Gregory VII held in his hands. Henry was defied by his own subjects, who were ready to elect another emperor.

In the bitter winter of 1077 Gregory VII could see the triumph of his efforts. Before the cardinals' eyes, barefoot and kneeling, exhausted by a three-day's fast like a common sinner, Emperor Henry IV kissed the papal slippers and asked forgiveness. A monastery in the Alps was the setting for this powerful reaffirmation of the supremacy of papal over secular power.

In the next decades the conflict between the papacy and the emperors was to undergo many sharp reversals. The policy of Gregory VII himself would long be disputed but nothing would be able to efface the lesson he taught the empire. It was from Gregory VII that the most powerful secular ruler of the time learned to treat his subjects primarily as believing Christians and only secondarily as his own vassals.



## THE WAYS OF GOD AND THE WAYS OF MEN

### **A The expansion of Western Christianity (11th-13th Century)**

In the 11th-13th centuries the medieval West lived under signs of sweeping movements that changed men's lives. Economically this was the time when vast areas of uncultivated land were appropriated. Man's advance on the forest brought about an increase in production. This, in turn, enhanced trade, another movement whose scope was broadening.

Politically, the expansion was multifaceted. To the northwest the Normans conquered England. To the northeast the German knights colonized the coast of the North and the Baltic Sea under the flag of the Cross. They incorporated into the Western Church the pagan Lithuanians, Prussians and Slavs who lived there. Embodied by the Spanish Reconquista\*, Western Christianity was steadily advancing in the south. Hired by the Spanish kings, a lot of knights from Southern France participated in this advance's decisive stage in the 12th-13th centuries. The Moslems were driven nearly to the south coast of the Iberian peninsula where the small Moslem state of Granada with its glamorous capital Alhambra survived.

The other southern boundary of mid-11th century Europe was still in Norman hands. Known as the "kingdom of Italy and Sicily"\*, the state founded by Robert Guiscard in South Italy was

one of the most interesting political formations of the Middle Ages. In the middle of the 12th century in its capital, Palermo, Normans rubbed shoulders with Italians, Byzantines, and Moslems. The official documents of the royal chancellery were issued in Latin, Greek and Arabic. This state became the political model of a monarchy and a cultural example imitated by the West.

In the East, the Crusades resulted in the formations of the small Latin states of the Near East. Within Europe itself powerful nobles were increasing their possessions or creating new states at the expense of weaker neighbours.

Everything seemed possible only if you had a purpose and God's support. Norman knights conquered England and South Italy, German knights settled on the Baltic coast, French knights were covered with glory in Spain. Everyone easily left their native lands, for the whole Christian world was home to the medieval man.

The general movement that took over Europe knew no limits. It needed roads, however. These left by the Romans were still functioning especially in Southern France, Italy, and Spain. In the North the Roman roads had been destroyed and they were quite insufficient as links between the newly-established cities, fortresses, and monasteries. New roads were built or if there were no such roads, the faster and cheaper waterways were used.

The direction of roads followed the interests of the people who used them.



Armed with sticks, stooping monks and peasants, pilgrims and students, knights and tradesmen, ill and suffering people walked them. The road was the trial they had to live through before attaining the gift of Salvation. Most of these people took to the road compelled by the spirit of Christianity, literally enacting Christ's words: "Leave all and follow me".

## **B** People who travel

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With advances in technology in the 11th century, farming freed labour forces for other activities. Among the peasants there were such who left their plots and walked the roads in search of adventure as well as a living. At certain places they were buying things cheaper than elsewhere. Some of them managed to sell their goods with a good profit and bought new merchandise with the money they earned. Over time they bought a vehicle, gathered in groups, and travelled from fair to fair. Bargaining became their trade. They were called "dusty feet" and were frequently treated with contempt, but even more frequently people would buy things from them. These were the merchants thanks to whom the exchange of goods and active trade was resuscitated. In the 11th century they still spent all their life on the road.

Another important travelling group were the knights, again because of their occupation. The roads of Western Europe were frequented by knights going to fulfill their duties to their lord, going to the wars, or simply hunting: or knights errant in search of adventure, who dreamt of covering themselves with glory like the heroes of the chivalric epics: Roland, Le Cid, or King Arthur.

Whatever the purpose of their travels, the knights had to keep their oath of guarding the roads from highwaymen and protecting the poor, monks and clergy, and pilgrims. These duties,

inseparable from the chivalric code, made them frequently wander from their ostensible goal. Sometimes months, even years had to pass before the knight reached his actual destination.

Pilgrims were the most numerous group of travellers, and the most untiring, too. Their journey was totally devoid of any practical goal and it was usually the longest. It took them to some monastery holding the relics of a great saint, or to the Son's grave in Jerusalem. For the most certain way for a man to purge himself of earthly sins in this world was the pilgrimage to holy relics. Before that, however, one had to go through many ordeals, give generous charity, and suffer privation. To these people the straight Roman road, meant for the quick transportation of soldiers and officials, was unimportant. They made many detours only to worship the relics of some local saint or to hear the preaching of a celebrated bishop. Even when they had transportation, pilgrims did not cover more than 24 to 40 km a day. In spite of everything knights, ladies, peasants and nobles all carried only small amounts of money and a bundle of the barest necessities. At least once in their lives they made for Santiago de Compostella, Rome or Jerusalem.

It was not just any travel that did one good; only the journeys with a pious purpose did so. Various writings of the time condemn people travelling only to see beautiful sights. Wanderers were considered miserable and tourism a sinful vanity.

## **C** People Who Pray

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The whole enormous mass of pilgrims who were constantly on the road needed sheltering, food, protection and encouragement in their difficult progress. This care fell on the Church and especially on the monastic fraternities whose pious and humble life brought



them closest to the Christian ideal. The greater number of Cluniac monasteries, numbering 1200 towards the end of the 12th century were built in Spain, along the pilgrims' roads to Santiago de Compostella. Behind their walls the faithful found protection, cures for ailments, or simply the food and shelter they could hardly pay for elsewhere. They had all this thanks to the industrious labour of the monks. Even in the years of their greatest devastation, monastery estates could each provide for the several hundreds of the peasants living on them, as well as for a multitude of pilgrims.

Monks passed their lives in labour and prayer, according to the rules of the Benedictine code, but the cruel time of the wars left its mark upon them, too. The virtues of the warrior were inscribed onto the pious monastic service. Monks were treated as knights protecting people from the most terrible dangers, the invisible ones. Their weapons were prayer and the words of the Holy Writ. The monastery chapel resounded with the Gregorian chant eight hours a day. This loud, masculine chant was the spear the monks threw at Satan's fold, as well as a terrestrial echo of the song of heaven's angelic armies. The world was grateful to these people, for it believed that their sacrifice could bring salvation to all Christians. Therefore, Knights and peasants, rich and poor, generously donated to the monasteries. The wealth thus collected was spent on new churches, manuscripts, hospitals, asylums and schools.

On the pages of manuscripts and on the walls of churches, images of the Christ child in his mother's lap, Archangel Michael piercing the dragon, Satan, the Last Judgement, and God Almighty proliferated. These simple but impressive images had to complete the Christian education of a usually illiterate majority of believers. Most of them well knew that Man was a territory claimed by both God and Satan. According to the one or the other's success

virtuous people went to heaven, sinners to hell. The tragedy of ordinary man was his enormous difficulty to tell good from evil. He always feared being cheated by some evil sorcerer in a saint's likeness. On the other hand, he could fully trust the monks who kept the relics of true saints. In the monastery chapel the pilgrim could touch these relics and thus expel all evil from himself. There, surrounded by holy images, he felt safe. Ravished, he would kneel with knotted hands and bow his head before the statues in obedience to God, his heavenly lord. Prayer was his oath of allegiance. This sincere faith, occasionally tortured by doubts and mixed with a lot of naivety, was the engine of the large-scale building which covered Western Europe with "a white pall of cathedrals."

## The way to God : Gothic art

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The Christian world was vertically open, looking heavenwards. There were no insuperable barriers, either material or spiritual, between the terrestrial and the celestial. Of course there were chasms to stride over and ordeals to pass through but no one ever doubted that the via regia of the soul's pilgrimage finally led to God.

In its path to God, humanity had its vigilant and industrious champions, the angels, always ready to save people from demonic encroachment. According to the age's notions an invisible ladder connected earth to heaven. Thus the heavenly creatures could go up and down, giving support to Christian people in their uncertain steps. The theme of the ladder can still be recognized in churches built between the 11th and the 13th centuries. At certain places these peculiar representations are executed with remarkable skill, while elsewhere they display a strangely primitive naivete. Still, whether in Northern Germany or in Southern France, they are all lit by the over-



whelming hope of man aspiring to his God. Amidst the flutter of myriad wings, angelic as well as demonic, man slowly ascended the ladder, falling to rise, walking upward and falling again, as is his destiny. He never forgot that heaven was as real as earth and that they were one.

To this world picture, bringing together heaven and earth, corresponded a notion of time that dispensed with discontinuity. Time and eternity, the brief moment and infinity, life and immortality were only sides of the same whole. This found its magnificent expression in the medieval chronicle. A narrative about the past, the chronicle of the Middle Ages usually started with the beginning of history, with Creation, even if it had to only tell the story of a local cloister. The bird's eye view of world events alternated with specific details about familiar everyday life. The poor harvest or the successful war of some local lord cropped up into descriptions of the deeds of the apostles, Hun invasions, or the wars of Charlemagne. Only people who imagined the world as a spatially and temporally united whole could think in this way.

Aspiring towards heaven, medieval man was fundamentally concerned with the image of God, whose features softened with the relaxation of earlier moral standards. Towards the middle of the 12th century the fearful God of Romanesque churches was displaced by the triumphant God of Gothic cathedrals, painted with a crown even in the crucifixion.

Born in the middle of the 12th century, the Gothic style in architecture and art in the 13th-14th centuries gradually established itself almost all around Western Europe. Its most important technical discoveries permitted the opening of spacious windows in the walls. The stained glass that filled the opened spaces achieved a much more powerful effect than the coloured reliefs and sculptures in the dusky interiors of Romanesque churches. In the Gothic facade the West entrance gradually displaced all other architectural elements. The Christians of the Gothic age more often thought of the wide open gates of the heavenly kingdom and of the light radiating from God falling on each and every human being.

## ***CHECK UP***

- 1. Which were the directions of Western Christianity's expansion in the 12th - 13th centuries ?*
- 2. What made medieval people travel a lot? Name the major groups of travellers.*
- 3. How did Gothic art reflect the changed outlook of twelfth-century man ?*



## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Devil's Brood or Spiritual Exiles**

Medieval Christianity was quite tolerant of the range of Christians but intolerant of anyone not Christian. There were two fully dissimilar groups, Jews and heretics. The only thing they shared was a refusal to conform to the Christian establishment. However, in the Middle Ages this earned them the contempt of Christians. The monk Berthold of Regensburg (12 century) even called Jews and heretics "the Devil's brood".

Berthold's words express the traditional medieval attitude to Jews. To the medieval believer the Jews had always been descendants of the people who sentenced Christ to death. The notion resulted in the many restrictions imposed on Jews. They, for instance, could not possess land of their own. On the other hand, ever since Roman times the Jews had been living primarily in the cities built on major trade routes. The combination of these two circumstances made Jews focus on trade and usury and throughout the 11-12th centuries, they had no rivals in these spheres in the West. Moreover, usury was in principle a forbidden practice with Christians.

Thus Jews found themselves in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, the medieval West needed their money. On the other, their difference and wealth often irritated the others. Thus the local Jew was frequently burdened with the whole responsibility for the city's worries.

Eleventh-century Western Europe was marked by a growing open antisemitism manifesting itself in proliferating pogroms and persecutions of Jews. In the beginning of the 13th century the Church even forced the Jews to always wear a special badge, a cloth circle sewn to their overcoats.

Unlike the Jews who chose not to join the Christian world, heretics deliberately deviated from it. The Christian world regarded them as particularly dangerous and the church used against them its two most extreme forms of punishment: excommunication and the interdict. Heretics in fact had been a standing problem but in the 12th century a form of heresy arose that was immune to these two ecclesiastical weapons. The Cathars ('the pure ones', Gr.) believed that the entire material world, Church and clergy included, was the deed of Satan, the Evil God. According to them this world and the Church should be unflinchingly rejected and every form of labour and social organization despised. Their views clearly echoed the Bogomils'. In the middle of the 12th century Northern Italy fell victim to the Cathar heresy. It grew especially threatening, however, when it reached Southern France, where it attracted lords and common folk alike.

Failures against the Cathars made the Church seek new means to eradicate heresy. Thus in the beginning of the 13th century the Holy Inquisition, a special tribunal for the trial of heretics, was founded.



## 25

## “LET’S DIE FOR JERUSALEM”: THE CRUSADES

### **A** The spirit of the age

All movements, migrations, upheavals and pilgrimages of the medieval West had in fact a rather limited scope. They covered the geographical and spiritual territory of the Christian world. Modern man is frequently impressed by the inaccuracy of medieval geography as to non-European lands. Thus, despite lively contacts with Egypt at the time, the river Nile was constantly changing position on various maps without bringing the least embarrassment to medieval scholarship.

Even more curious are the tales of those pious Christians who risked distant voyages. When after many adversities they found themselves in lands outside Europe, they as a rule encountered marvels there. Without the slightest embarrassment pilgrims and merchants gave detailed descriptions of lands where precious stones grew on trees and rich meals and sexual licence were common. Even the highly educated (by contemporary standards) Marco Polo eloquently tells of encountering in the East men with tails.

These were but tiny bits of the fantastic world populated with marvelous beasts, wrecklessness and dreams of plenty, born of the relatively poor and limited life experience of the European. The poor man’s naivety and envy are confused in these fantastic tales with medieval

man’s impressive vigour of purpose. This man was deeply convinced that the real world, the world in which he spent the better part of his life, was the one lit by the Christian creed. Everything outside this world looked unreal. When Europeans started travelling, they learned that a great number of people were living within this unreal space. This stirred the Christians’ sincerest concern for these people’s salvation, for missionary work was an integral part of medieval man’s religious outlook. Never had Christ’s words in the Gospels, “Go and teach all people and christen them in the name of God, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, been accepted with such literalness. In the 11th century the Western world responded to their meaning with all the crudity and devotion of its chivalric spirit. The intensified religious feeling created a peculiar atmosphere where each event, related to the faith and the church, reverberated deep and far.

The tension that had for centuries marked both wars with Moslems and trade with them sprang from the conviction that Islam had torn away a part of the Christian world. This attitude to Islam reached the depths of hatred when in the middle of the 11th century the Seljuk Turks conquered Jerusalem and desecrated the sacred place of Christianity, the Holy Land. In the minds of the medieval Europeans, Turks were identified with God’s enemies whom it would be criminal to make truce with. Their prophet, Mohammed, grew into a most im-



posing monster for the Christian imagination and he came to be identified with the Antichrist. Every true knight of the second half of the 11th century had one desire: to combat a Moslem and overcome him. The struggle with the Infidel became a major item on the chivalric code.

## **B** The first crusade

On November 27, 1095 Pope Urban II delivered a passionate speech at the Council of Clermont (now Clermont-Ferran). He appealed to all honorable Christians to make for the East and liberate the Holy Land from infidels violating its sacred relics.

The appeal deeply moved the audience and the Pope's plea for help was perceived as a sacred duty. When Urban ended his speech with the words, "God wisheth it", a powerful cry, "Thus wisheth God", was heard.

Unprecedented enthusiasm drove all Christians eastwards – peasants and knights, Normans and French, former enemies. Never had the Western world been thus united. As early as the beginning of 1096 led by Peter the Hermit and Walter the Beggar, crowds of men, women and old people flooded like a deep river the roads to Jerusalem. This first expedition comprised people unfamiliar with military organization and without any armament. They perished or were scattered before ever reaching the Holy Land. Their passing through German, Hungarian and Balkan lands was accompanied by furious pogroms against the Jews recognized as the infidels.

The failure of the first "Poor Men's Crusade" visibly proved that even a pious war needed discipline and organization. The following year a powerful army was formed under the auspices of the Pope and the flower of Western knighthood streamed to it. This army was

placed under the command of Godfrois de Bouillion and the most notable knights of the West. The red crosses worn by the knights on their palls gave the warriors their name of Crusaders.

Those who took part in this "Barons' Crusade" covered their names with glory which cost them dearly: They passed through the trials of an unusually long journey, the alien Asian climate, and the totally unknown terrain, offering great advantages to the enemy. After prolonged and difficult sieges Edessa (1097), Antioch (1098) and the cherished Jerusalem (1099) were finally conquered. The entry into the Holy City was accompanied with the murders of many non-Christians. The rage against infidels fell upon soldiers, women, and old people alike. After this bloodbath the Crusaders visited the Holy Sepulchre and, tears in their eyes, asked God to forgive them their cruelty. Such was the true face of the Crusaders – the people who carried on their spurs sea water and desert sand and marched thousands of kilometers in heavy armor to nonchalantly spill their own, and other people's, blood.

Of course, these rough soldiers were imperfect, unruly and proud, often senselessly cruel. But Christ created the Church for those in need of salvation: for people such as themselves. Behind everything the Crusaders were doing always stood the sincerest devotion – as interpreted by a swordman!

The liberated lands were divided between the nobility as feudal estates. Thus the first Latin states of the Near East came into being. Among these the Kingdom of Jerusalem had a priority of power. Godfrey of Bouillon, proud of his unique title "Defender of the Holy Land", was elected its king. Compelled to exist between Byzantium and the Islamic empires, these states lived in a permanent state of mobilization. As soon as they were formed, they started building solid fortresses, without which the few Crusaders could hardly preserve



their conquest. Though Jerusalem was in Christian hands, the roads that led there were still quite insecure. Care for their protection, as well as for the protection of pilgrims and knights crippled in the wars, engendered a new type of organization: the orders of warrior monks.

It seemed that the contact with the Holy Land inspired the knights for a new religiousness. Throughout the 11th -12th centuries they formed communities for mutual help and channelled their common efforts into establishing hospitals and asylums. Thus it was in the East that the orders of the Knights Templars\*, Knights Hospitallers\* and Teutonic knights\* were formed. The stern soldiers tried to live piously in accordance with Benedictine rules. And, though they participated in battles and severely punished highwaymen and charlatans, their activity earned them the Pope's blessing and gave them the status of a religious order.

## **C** The history of crusades in the 12th and 13th centuries

Very soon after their formation the Latin states in Asia Minor found themselves severely threatened. In 1144 the Moslems won Edessa back. This had a serious resonance throughout Western Europe. St Bernard of Clairvaux called European knights to another crusade. The French king Louis VII (1137-1180) and the German emperor Conrad III (1138-1152) took part in this second Crusade. They did not succeed in coordinating their efforts and after an unsuccessful attempt to conquer Damascus they had to go back to Europe.

At that time, in spite of military efforts, Christianity in Palestine was quickly reduced in number. When in 1187 Sultan Saladin conquered Jerusalem, Europe was again overwhelmed by a wave of religious enthusiasm. It gave impetus to the organi-

zation of the Third Crusade, which gathered the flower of Western knighthood under the command of the three most powerful European rulers: Philip II Augustus, Friedrich I Barbarossa, and Richard I Coeur de Lion. 'The Crusade of the Three Kings' (1189-1192) was marked by lasting disagreement which reduced its results to humble dimensions. Friedrich I was drowned in Asia Minor even before decisive warfare began. The united efforts of the French and the English king led to conquering only the important Palestine fortress of St Jean d'Acre? (now Acra).

Facing the prospect of a long-lasting and fruitless siege of Jerusalem, they preferred signing a truce with Saladin and returning to Europe. Richard Coeur de Lion (1189-1199) was selflessly performing chivalric feats left and right, the conquest of the Byzantine island of Cyprus being one of them. This blow was meant to punish Eastern Christians who had signed a pact with the Moslems.

Throughout the 13th century the old chivalric spirit persisted in a handful of people. Among them was the French king Louis IX (canonized as St. Louis in 1297) who twice, in 1248 and 1270, led a numerous army of crusaders to the lands of Saladin. It followed the king out of loyalty to and affection for him rather than Christ. Louis IX died in 1270 in Tunisia, stricken with the plague before he could achieve any considerable success.

## **D** Knights and merchants

When Urban II and St Bernard kindled the fire of crusade, they hoped they could turn Europe's endless wars into a just warfare, a struggle against the infidels. They wanted to purge the Christian world of scandalous fights between fellow Christians and provide a plausible outlet to the passionate belli-



cosity of feudal society, guiding it to a great purpose. As spiritual leader of the Crusaders' venture the Pope also counted on obtaining leverage to the rule over the West.

The Church succeeded in uniting and directing the hidden desires as well as the stifled worries of the West. The feelings and thoughts of Western Europeans had been long turned to the heavenly Jerusalem. The Church showed Christians that heavenly Jerusalem could also be realized through the earthly one, while it quenched the thirst for wandering typical of those Christians who did not feel quite at home with earthly existence. The Crusades offered them the opportunity to satisfy all of their desires: adventure, wealth and eternal salvation.

To bring the bliss of heaven to earth, to find the heavenly Jerusalem in this world, was the great dream and illusion of the medieval West. The spirit of crusade was long preserved with the lower social strata where its myths were particularly powerful. The Crusade of the Children in the beginning of the 12th century became the embodiment of this fascination with the idea of regaining the lost paradise.

The feats of the Crusaders gave birth to a number of descriptions authentic as well as fantastic, but loved by all. When these chivalric epics were put down, they manifested something novel for the West. Not only were they full of the personages of olden times such as Charlemagne, but even the names of actually existing Crusade leaders underwent curious change. They were either all French, or all German, or English, according to the respective vernacular in which the heroic verse was written. For example the King of Jerusalem, Godfrey, is the Godfrid of the 13th and 14th century German epic. The first literary texts in the national Eu-

ropean languages were coming into being, and they appropriated the glory of the Crusades.

Throughout the 12th century and later many people who did not find the meaning of their collective and individual lives in their native places obeyed the call of oversea territories. There they had to live on the "edge" between Western and Eastern Christianity on the one hand, and Islam on the other. This nourished the spirit of confrontation, and included in the enemy's ranks were Orthodox Christians along with Moslem infidels. Thus the gap between Christian East and Christian West, opened by the Great Schism of 1054, sowed the seeds of a hate impossible to uproot.

The other side of this tense living "on the edge" was the new familiarity with the enemy, which expanded Western Christianity's notions of the world. Mohammed was still a monster but his terrible face could now be found in the Latin translation of the Koran. On their return the Crusaders would bring home not just glory and the scars of war, but something of the Eastern taste for luxury and comfort as well.

Italian cities, however, were the actual winners. During the last crusades the chivalric armies had to more and more frequently "work" for their transportation, doing military favours for Venetians and Genoese in whose hands the whole Mediterranean trade was concentrated. The wealth accumulated by Venice and Genoa outshaded even those treasures of the East the Crusaders presented as gifts to the Pope. The trade colonies set up (from the Black Sea to North Africa) consolidated the Italians' positions in the East. These colonies allowed them to dictate conditions to both Byzantine and European rulers whenever their interests traversed Mediterranean sea routes.



## CHECK-UP

1. Outline the medieval idea of the non-Christian world. How was it formed?
2. Why did Pope Urban II's appeal have such a wide resonance?
3. What changes did the idea of Crusade undergo towards the end of the 12th century? Give their causes.
4. What consequences did the crusades have East and West?
5. Compare the idea of crusade with Byzantium's holy war against the Persians in the 7th century. Were there any similarities between these? Give your opinions.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

# 26

### THE AGE OF CHANGE: BYZANTIUM IN THE 11TH-12TH CENTURIES

#### **A** motley world

In the middle of the 11th century the borders of Byzantium reached from the Caucasus to Southern Italy and from the Danube to Palestine. They encompassed a remarkable natural and climatic variety: the stern snowy mountain ranges of the Balkans and the interior of Asia Minor alternated with the vast fruitful planes of Misia, Thrace, and the coast of Asia Minor.

The varied landscape promoted the cultivation of almost everything medieval man needed for his everyday life. Stock-breeding in the mountainous regions gave meat, dairy products and furs. Thessaly and Epirus (?) exported high-quality honey – the sugar of the Middle Ages. In both Asia Minor and the Balkans there were rich deposits of gold, silver, iron and copper – the basic metals of the time.

The greatest share of production belonged to crops and vine-growing, which gave the essential products of bread and wine. The empire's subjects consumed half to one kilogram of bread of various quality per day. Its taste both at breakfast and supper was improved with wine diluted with warm water. Moderate wine consumption was recommended even by monastic regulations, notorious for their severe treatment of culinary pleasures as they were. While at the frequent fasts the pious Byzantine was quite abstemious, at feasts or a friendly gathering he was a real glutton. An incessant curiosity about exotic spices and the combination of various tastes and flavours filled the pages of the private correspondence of Byzantines who would frequently exchange recipes and ideas of a wholesome diet.

The inexhaustible natural and economic variety of Byzantium was complemented by ethnic difference. The Byzantine people, the "masters of the world", con-



sisted of Greeks, Armenians, Slavs, Syrians and many other nations. Their sense of belonging to a community was based on the two factors of Orthodox Christianity and imperial rule, one for all subjects.

In the 11th century tension was rising along all borders of the empire. On the west, in their Italian possessions, the Byzantines had to meet the pressure of the Norman dukes of Sicily. The heavy cavalry of knights led by Robert Guiscard persistently attempted to drive the Byzantines out of Southern Italy. At the same time in the east, along the traditional line of tension between the Christian and the Islamic world, were the Seldjuk Turks. Nomads of the Northern Caspian coast, in their movement westward they joined Mohammed's faith. Their more primitive but better disciplined military society displaced, in the beginning of the 11th century, the Arabs from their leading position in the Islamic community. Firm military organization and light nomadic cavalry were the advantages that guaranteed the Seldjuks' success against the Byzantines in the combat for the arid lands of Central Asia Minor.

At the same time in the north the raids of steppe peoples – Pechenegs, Uzes, and Koumans – brought frequent devastation on the Balkan provinces. Thus at the end of the 11th century Byzantium faced the growing necessity for a large mobile standing army to guarantee the defence of its borders.

## **B** The crisis at the end of the 11th century: the history of a collapse

In the late 1060s when Seldjuk pressure became particularly heavy, the emperor's throne at Constantinople was occupied by Romanus IV (1068-1071). An excellent soldier and a good general, he had won several very impressive victories. Led by the desire to put up a decisive resistance against the Seldjuks, in

1071 Romanus made for the the most distant eastern parts of Asia Minor. Near the city of Manzikert he fought a decisive battle, in which the Byzantine army was defeated and he himself captured.

This defeat, not at all the most terrible one, soon grew into a real disaster for the Empire. Romanus' enemies at Constantinople expediently enthroned Michael VII (1071-1078). At the same time Romanus managed to buy his personal freedom from the Seldjuks at the cost of certain territorial concessions in Asia Minor and Syria. In Constantinople, however, he encountered the decrees of the new emperor which proclaimed him enemy of the state. This started a civil war, with Byzantines fighting on each side. After two successive defeats Romanus surrendered to his foes and disclaimed the throne on the promise to have his life saved. Instead he was blinded and soon died of his wounds.

But Michael VII did not have the chance to feel victorious. After a long siege under the pressure of the Normans Bari, the last Byzantine fortress in Southern Italy, had to surrender. The Seldjuk Turks advanced in Asia Minor. The demands of defence grew and so did taxes, which increased discontent with the government in Constantinople. The subjects were riotous, especially in the provinces. In 1072 Skopje became the centre of a Bulgarian rebellion that expressed discontent with oppressive taxation and promoted the restoration of the Bulgarian state. The Serbian prince, Constantine Bodin, was proclaimed Bulgarian tsar under the name of Petur. The whole decade between 1071 and 1081 was, for the Empire, a period of permanent tension, when every problem was solved by force of arms. Plotting and bloodshed left their dark imprint upon this period.

The causes of all these events far surmounted in importance the defeat at Manzikert. They sprang from the conflict between the civil and the military administration, both competing for supremacy in governing the Empire. The secret of Byz-



antine political success was in the balancing role of strong imperial rule. Having exclusive prerogatives, the emperor balanced the two administrations, giving priority to one or the other according to the needs of the moment, without ever allowing either of them any long-lasting dominance.

Byzantium's major problem at the end of the 11th century was the lack of powerful emperors who could direct the empire's efforts to immediate military goals. Military energy was wasted instead in civil riots and wars, and the emperor's unstable power fell an easy pray to sword and intrigue. This created chaos in which taxes arbitrarily went up and laws could not be effectively applied. The Empire's subjects lost faith in its institutions. The spirit of impunity and despair fed the riots against the government. More and more Byzantines chose to leave the army, their place taken by mercenaries who had no moral constraints in wars against the emperor's own subjects. This transformed the alienation from institutions into hatred of foreigners, and only broadened the gap between rulers and their subjects.

## The Age of the Comnenes

In the last decades of the 11th century Byzantium desperately needed an emperor of Alexius I Comnenus' energy (1081-1118). Even before going round the emperor's rooms, he had to make for Drach where in 1081 the Norman army embarked. For a number of years the Western Bulgarian lands were the arena of bitter fights. Toward 1085 the army of Alexius I succeeded in finally driving out the knights of Robert Guiscard.

The following years were marked by the struggle against the Pechenegs who were not only uncontrolled lords over the lands between the Danube and the Balkan range, but also undertook devastating raids to Thrace. Luck fol-

lowed Alexius there again. In the middle of the 1090s the power of the empire on the Balkans was stabilized.

At that time Alexius I turned his eyes to the east. The greater part of Asia Minor was at the time in the hands of the Seldjuks. Its recovery was an ambitious political goal, for whose accomplishment, as the soldier Alexius knew only too well, Byzantium needed a powerful ally. He addressed the Crusaders of the first Crusade, promising them support, while they took an oath to return the liberated lands to Byzantium. The Crusaders, however, broke their oath and established their own states in the Near East.

Under Alexius I's successors – John (1118-1143) and Manuel (1143-1180) – the conflict with the Crusaders dominated the empire's eastern policy. Unions with the Crusaders were frequently interrupted by wars but one way or another they thoroughly occupied Byzantine attention, until the Seldjuk Turks were permanently settled in the mountaneous regions of Central and Eastern Asia Minor. This disposition of forces was preserved in the middle of the 12th century as well, when the king of Jerusalem became vassal to the Byzantine emperor.

Byzantium achieved supremacy over the Latin states under the third Comnenus, Manuel I. Despite the loss of the inner parts of Asia Minor, thanks to the consolidation of Balkan territories the Empire had at the time a stable state centre. Peace in the east was guaranteed by the peace treaty with the Seldjuk sultanate. Politics in Southeastern Europe were totally under the control of Byzantium, while Manuel did not hide his ambitions for Italy itself.

Less than a hundred years had elapsed since the time when Alexius Comnenus had to drive the empire's enemies away from the very walls of Constantinople. Under his grandson Byzantium enjoyed the same power and glory as under its most glorious rulers. What was the secret of this success?





## The faces of change

Contemporaries are unanimous in answering: change. Some changes were obvious. Alexius I himself had abandoned the Great Palace and had made the Vlacherna Palace in south-east Constantinople his residence. Besides, the Comnenes were frequently absent from the capital. Possessed by a militant spirit, instead of signing in purple ink heaps of state documents, the new emperors took their army on endless campaigns now to the Danube, now to Syria. They rushed in snow and rain, day and night to catch up with the enemy, leaving the supply, tents and worried secretaries far behind. The emperor could be seen mounting together with the common soldiers movable ladders to enter besieged fortresses under a shower of arrows, or dragging heavy stones for the repair of city walls. Alexius Comnenus never parted with his army even when he had to be carried next to his horse. From the very outset of his rule Constantinople had to get used to the thought that the emperor stayed with his army.

The whole Comnenian reform was affected by the soldierly spirit. It gave priority to the military administration in the provinces, because of the army's enormous influence at the time. Along with this, however, the reform imposed as stable a control as was possible in the 12th century. The loyalty of provinces was guaranteed by the promotion to high state positions of people connected to the Comnenian family.

The changes in the administration remained hidden to the world outside Byzantium, but this world got undisputable proofs that the empire was abandoning its policy of "glorious isolation". The emperor's court itself was

opening to the world. Never before the Comneni had Constantinople seen so many princesses of a foreign origin. A comparable number of Byzantine princesses were taken through dynastic marriage to various European courts.

There were many mercenaries from Western Europe in the Byzantine army. They introduced certain European manners into the Empire's life. The Emperor Manuel I Comnenus himself found the chivalric taste for military achievement and love affairs quite inspiring. In his age glamorous parties, concerts of instrumental and vocal music, even tournaments were organized at the Vlacherna palace. What most impressed the conservative Byzantine spirit in these glorious festivities was the presence of many good-looking, educated women of free and easy manners.

Manuel himself provoked the envy and reproach of moralists with his numerous love affairs. Some of them were really scandalous, such as his love for his niece, Theodora. Even his severest critics, however, had to admit that the beauty of his favourites was quite irresistible. Such was Manuel, the most colourful of the Comneni, brave soldier and passionate admirer of feminine beauty, embodiment of imperial change.

In Continental Greece, in the city of Daphne, a long way from Constantinople, still stands the church of "Our Lady's Assumption". Its walls are decorated with mosaics which use the rare technique of the masters of the capital. Both church and mosaics are late 11th century, from the time of the Comneni, when flourishing provincial towns had the means and the self-confidence to create the exemplary artefacts characteristic of the capital's art. The fact suggests the great advance in the provinces' economic development indicates that Constantinople was no longer exceptional.



## CHECK-UP

1. *How did Byzantium's natural and ethnic variety affect its economy, government and position in Europe?*
2. *Describe the political situation of the Comneni's ascension to the throne.*
3. *Who was the target of the Comneni's military campaigns and how did they end?*
4. *Describe the essence of the Comneni's reform. What were its consequences?*

## FACES OF HISTORY:

### **Anna Comnena – being a woman in Constantinople**

In December 1083 the Emperor, Alexius I Comnenus, headed a military campaign against the Normans while the birth of his first child was expected in Constantinople. When she felt her first birth throes, the Empress Irine crossed her belly and exclaimed: "Child, wait till your father comes back!" As if by miracle the baby was really born three days later, when Alexius was already in the palace. This child was the porphyrogene Anna Comnena, one of the most remarkable women Constantinople ever knew.

A few years after the festivities on the occasion of Anna's birth, the Byzantine capital was celebrating again – this time Anna's engagement to Constantine Doukas. The citizens of the capital greeted the Emperor Alexius I and the youthful brides in whom people saw the throne's future heirs. Thus the throne became accessible to Anna even before she was five.

The next decade and a half of the princess's life passed in the careful study of all a future emperor should know. And in the case of Byzantium there was a lot to learn. Constantinople was amazed by the talents of Anna, who showed a remarkable gift for rhetoric, philosophy, history, literature, geography and myth. She, however, devoted most of her time to what was most important: ancient philosophy and Orthodox theology.

The carefree youth of the court's acknowledged favourite was shadowed by a single event, the birth of her brother, John. When he was only three, Alexius's first-born son was crowned co-emperor, just as Constantine Doukas was. The ceremony stirred an un-childishly bitter disappointment in the very young Anna. Suddenly she found she was no longer the only appointed heir to the throne, and when Constantine Doukas prematurely died, her chances to ever ascend it thawed away. There was no limit, however, to this over-intelligent, well-educated, and beautiful woman's ambition.

In 1118 the court was tensely awaiting for the dying emperor to make his choice and give his ring either to John or to Anna's husband, Nicephorus Vrienius. The empress-mother did everything possible to keep her first-born son away from the emperor's death-bed. Still the choice fell on him.

The untiring Anna made several attempts to remove her brother from the throne and was even angry with her husband for refusing to participate in her plottings. Finally when these were uncovered, she retired to a nunnery in the company of her books, the one thing she cherished as much as imperial power.



Anna was 36 when she chose monastic seclusion. Fate ordained it that this remarkable woman should live three more decades, devoted only to God and to books. In the nunnery she wrote her sad "Alexiadas". Dedicated to her father, the ideal emperor, the book nostalgically strived to recover an irrevocable past. The laws of Byzantine succession mercilessly interrupted

Anna's progress to power. Due to this, however, Byzantine literature received one of its oddest and most widely read masterpieces. On the pages of her book Anna wrote everything she could not do as the empire's ruler. Her weapons were the words of Homer, Thucydides, Herodotus, Sappho, or the Christian theologians whom she was perfectly familiar with.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

# 27

### MAN VERSUS STATE: THE LONELY MAN

#### **A** Social instability: the mobile society

Medieval Byzantium was a wonderful example of the state's enormous role in all forms of social life. The family, the basic unit of Byzantine society, was, for example, the object of special care on the part of administrative power. Marriage was a long ceremony of various rites, nuptials being central among them. Once created, the family was guarded by a stable system of laws unknown to Western Europe at the time. It treated marriage as a great gift of God and its destruction as a heavy crime. Adulterers in Byzantium would frequently have their noses chopped off, this being also the punishment for rebellion against the state.

All this care for the family's stability, however, was superceded by the

emperor's will. If he judged that the marriage was for some reason inexpedient, he had the right to dissolve the bond. The Byzantines were deeply convinced that his will expressed the supreme interest of the state, which transcended everything.

The Empire treated property in a similar way. Byzantines could carry out all sorts of property transactions: they could buy or sell, lease, donate or inherit immovables. The owner's private initiative could achieve a lot, though not everything. When it stood against the law, it had to suffer all the severity of imperial punishment. Within a day the law could turn yesterday's rich man into the poorest of beggars. But through the emperor's will one could with an equal speed find himself a fairly well-to-do person. Sanctified by both Church and law, the emperor's supreme right to dispose of all the landed property,



movables and immovables, in the Empire superceded all private property in Byzantium. Thus man in Byzantium, rich or poor, was used to living with the thought that the law stood higher than any private initiative and that public interest transcended all private property.

The fact that Byzantium did not know inheritance through consanguinity shaped the peculiar image of its ruling elite. There was no aristocracy of birth in Byzantium, like the one which concentrated to itself political power in the West. The road to high positions was open to practically anyone who had the energy, brains, and good education required. Merit was to be noticed by the emperor at any cost. It was the emperor's grace above all which shaped true success. Byzantine literature is full of descriptions of people raised through the will of the emperor from extreme poverty to the highest state positions. If, however, through some misdemeanour a noble fell into disfavour with the emperor, then he would be, more than any other subject, threatened by confiscation of his property, banishment, imprisonment, or public disgrace.

For a number of reasons Medieval Byzantium guaranteed its subjects' equality before the court and the law. This made impossible the setting apart of specially privileged groups sharing functions of government. The ruling elite of the Empire comprised people who, due to personal qualities or mere chance, occupied important positions within the enormous and smoothly functioning state machine of Byzantium, but who were totally deprived of the opportunity to pass their status on to their sons.

## **B** The Emperor's power

According to official Byzantine notions, the emperor's power had a divine origin. Irrespective of the way in

which he had ascended to the throne – and it was often through murder, bribe, or intrigue – the emperor was regarded as having been placed there by God himself, while the coronation rite had purged him of all preceding sin.

The Byzantine emperor was considered the lawful ruler of the entire Christian world, while the lands possessed by barbarians were regarded as only temporarily lost. All citizens of the Empire were declared “children” to “the father”: the emperor's power over them was practically unlimited. This was so because according to the Byzantines, God had created the Empire for purposes transcending human history. Its mission was to guard the established earthly order till the time of the Heavenly Kingdom arrived. No earthly authority could surmount that of a man entrusted with such an important mission.

As for heavenly authority over the emperor, it was a somewhat different issue. The pompous Byzantine ceremonial\*, which defined a heavenly and omnipotent ruler, constantly reminded all that this man only executed God's will. The magnificent Byzantine emperors, dressed in gold and purple, standing amid incense smoke, could not even briefly allow themselves to forget they were mortal. One of the first things an emperor was obliged to do after his coronation was choose the marble for his own grave.

If the emperor could treat his subjects with proud supremacy, in his relation to his own master, God, he could only show humility. Before his coronation he signed in his own hand an oath to be pious and humble. If he broke that oath, the patriarch from whom he had received the crown could take God's blessing off him and demand the heaviest punishment for him. An embodiment of the empire's law, the emperor himself had to strictly observe the holy Christian law of the Bible and the Church was authorized to monitor his compliance.



The Church was also responsible for the symbols of imperial power. The crown and all other regalia were kept at Saint Sophia and the emperor could wear them only during ceremonies. He would then occupy the throne which, in the case of Byzantium, was a two-seated one. The right seat always remained empty for it was the seat of God, true ruler of the Empire, the emperor being merely his servant. To be worthy of his position, the emperor had to imitate Christ, the most pious among men. Just as Christ washed the feet of his 12 apostles on the eve of his Crucifixion, the emperor, too, could be seen washing the feet of 12 beggars of the capital on the eve of Easter, the day of Christ's resurrection and the Empire's greatest holiday.

For the Byzantine the holiest thing was the Empire itself: the emperor's personality was not of any particular importance. Were he an usurper, his abilities would soon enough show. Such an idea of imperial rule easily accounts for the many coups against emperors marking Byzantine history. If the Byzantine was true to his state to the end of the world, he was true to his emperor only so long as his personal qualities corresponded to imperial greatness. According to courtly etiquette the emperor's death was announced with the words, "The emperor died as a man!" There could hardly have been a more eloquent expression of the eternity of the emperor's power, and of the transitory nature of the one who bore it.

## **C** The perfect official

The career of the state official was an attractive lot for everybody in Byzantium, because of the enormous wealth and social prestige it entailed. Those who chose to follow it, however, had to obey an ideal that left no room

for human nature, bias, weakness, or personal idiosyncrasy.

The Byzantine official never was a mere tax collector, magistrate, general, scribe, or treasurer. He was a missionary, a man bearing the enormous responsibility and the exceptional honour of being part of God's holy deed in founding the empire. Like his emperor the Byzantine official was a special servant of God.

Unquestioning obedience to the emperor was prerequisite but not sufficient for the official to fulfill his duty. He had to avoid the temptations and base thoughts of the sinful human world. The official, therefore, just as the monk, had to break his relations with the world.

Forgetting your friends, even your parents was nothing compared to being successful in your career. A favourite example for moralizing was the official who sentenced his own parents for having transgressed the law. Eunuchs were closest to the ideal of an official, for they, like angels, were devoid even of sex. Having thus placed themselves outside human society, according to the ideas of the time they were much closer to God, and far from the sinful thoughts of common men. This explains why eunuchs were among the Byzantine emperors' favourite officials, entrusted with key positions in the state government.

The whole public life on the Byzantine official was shaped by court ceremony. It was crucial for him to know his place in the hierarchy, and be familiar with all the ceremonial gestures and formula he should employ in this grand spectacle that displayed the harmony ruling over imperial government.

## **D** Ideal and Reality

In Byzantium more than anywhere else, the high ideals of power were guaranteed by solid mechanisms of govern-



ment. The latter ensured the stable unity of the empire, though they could not totally control multifaceted reality. Next to Saint Sophia in Constantinople stood the hippodrome. The same Constantinople square resounded with solemn church hymns and the cries of one or another jockey's admirers. Byzantines were equally enthusiastic about religious and Carnival mask processions. Both the elite and the common folk gloried in the joys of circus shows, the practical jokes of the clowns, physical power, and the skill of acrobats.

In the streets of Byzantium, in the courts of justice or at the emperor's court, in the temple and on the hypodrome, two different facets of public life confronted each other. The one was the ideal, represented by the emperor and his officials who, to the last button of their dress, embodied the perfect order ordained by God. The other was reality: the audience in the hypodrome, the enthusiastic crowd of Carnival processions or the cruel face of street riot. The entire Byzantine world was marked by this incessant confrontation of ideal with real.

Everyday life rivalled for attention with ideal rule. Dramatism was satisfied through the traditional Byzantine sense of humour and love of a good

joke and, above all, by the long-cultivated discipline of the personality in the face of omnipotent imperial rule.

In the 11th and 12th centuries the clash between ideal and real life in the Byzantine society gave birth to an interesting phenomenon, the private life of the Byzantine. The necessity to observe strict rules in public places required that personal tastes and preferences should be isolated from social conduct. Their locus was the private home, a little space walled from the world, equipped with its own farm land or with big food stores and all necessities. The home was the place of unlimited personal freedom, where the need for contact with the outer world was reduced to a minimum. In the centre of this small private world stood a man, working or enjoying himself in his own self-made ways.

The contrast between public and private was truly glaring. Solemn ceremonial dress contrasted with the comfortable, loose, and humble home wear made of soft cotton or some other material. The man who used the same elaborate formulas in his official rhetoric discussed freely with friends issues of philosophy, poetry, rhetoric or more mundane things like health care and recipes for savoury meals.

## **CHECK-UP**

1. Give your examples to prove that Byzantine emperors had unlimited power.
2. Did private property exist in Byzantium? Give your arguments.
3. What advantages and what limitations did high state service impose on the Byzantine official?
4. What was the Byzantine's private life like?



## FACES OF HISTORY:

### A Home for God and Men: The Orthodox Temple

Central to the Byzantine's life was his encounter with God in the temple, God's own home. The importance of the contact accounts for the special attention Byzantium paid to church interiors. It was filled with a rich and lavish decoration of mosaics, frescoes, columns, and arches. Surrounded thus by the richest colours known to the Middle Ages, hundreds of candles burned. Their light was oddly reflected by the marble of walls and floor and the glass pieces of the mosaics, and the flickering of hundreds of small lights seemed to enliven the sacred images on the walls.

The temple played a significant role in the service. That is why all its elements had transcendental significance. Columns were not just columns but the important pillars linking earth to heaven. Frescoes and mosaics were not just representations but living scenes from Christ's life, and every believer had a sense of briefly participating in them during the service. The dome was not just a vault arch but the firmament itself. It, therefore, always contained a representation of Christ the King (Pantocrator). Thus for the Byzantine the temple was a symbol of the world, its architecture and overall decoration aimed at embodying the incessant link between heaven and earth, God and man.

The temple and its decoration reflected the hierarchical order of the world, whose foundation was man himself. Above but quite close to him, at

eye-level, were the images of the worthiest among men, the exemplary saints.

This glorious brotherhood also contained prophets, apostles, martyrs, kings and patriarchs. Their faces looked similar on the icons, due to the Byzantine masters' attempt to show their resemblance to God himself.

Above the images of saints there was the pictorial representation of the most moving Christian narrative, the story of Christ's life on earth. The whole temple was girded with frescoes or mosaics depicting various episodes of those initial 33 years of Christian chronology. At first they were freely selected, but in the 11th century when Byzantium was seized by the passion for order, the practice changed. The classic cycle of twelve episodes – the Annunciation, Nativity, Candlemas, Lazarus' Resurrection, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion, the Descent into Hell, the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Assumption – was then established. These corresponded to the great Christian festivals and that is why the whole second row of images in the temple was known as the "festive cycle".

The highest images, just below the dome itself, were those of celestial beings, of angels and archangels. Above all stood the imposing figure of the Almighty, to confirm the central Orthodox idea that even on earth man could communicate with his God.



## THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER: THE BULGARIANS AND BYZANTIUM ( 11TH-12TH CENTURIES)

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### **A** The Balkan question

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In the beginning of the 11th century, when Byzantium was restoring its power over the Balkans, its range of dominance included various natural and ethnic landscapes. Difficult mountain ranges alternated with spacious plains, low, easily accessible highlands with fruitful valleys. In these various regions the seasons were marked by considerable temperature variations. This mixture of climatic conditions favoured the development of various agricultural activities, though it partially hampered communications.

The Balkan peninsula had a relatively dense population of considerable ethnic variety. There were clearly visible boundaries between the various ethnic groups. If the coast of the peninsula, from the Black Sea to the Adriatic, was predominantly populated with Greeks, Slavs prevailed in its interior, from the Danube to Central Greece. Most numerous among them were the Bulgarians, who formed the compact population of the traditional regions of Misia, Thrace, Macedonia and the Morava Valley. Besides these, Bulgarians also populated Albanian lands and Northern Greece. That is why, when Byzantium faced the necessity of integrating the diverse Balkan

peoples, it was especially concerned with shaping an adequate policy towards the Bulgarians.

At first sight, the common values of Orthodoxy could prevail over ethnic and cultural differences. But the Byzantines' treatment of the Bulgarians was ambiguous. Their Orthodoxy was mixed with pride in their ancient Greek heritage. Their attitudes to the Bulgarians voiced the old Hellenic contempt for "Barbarians", even if these were subjects of the empire.

This duality was pretty obvious in the fortunes of the Bulgarian Church. After the conquest of the Bulgarian lands its status was reduced from patriarchate to archbishopry centred in Ohrid. Byzantines gradually occupied the high positions in the church hierarchy. But even then the power of the Patriarch at Constantinople did not extend to the Archbishopry of Ohrid. It preserved its autonomy and its vast diocese, including almost all Bulgarian territories from the Black to the Adriatic Sea. Moreover, the state officials of the Empire were compelled to help the Bulgarian Church fulfill its duties.

All these measures were part of Byzantium's general accommodation to the new situation in the 11th-12th centuries. It was gradually turning from a Mediterranean empire into a continental state, thus it had to learn how to rule



over new lands and subjects and face all the consequences of this rule.

## **B** The time of conflict – the 11th century

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While the conquest of Bulgaria was taking place, the foundations of a policy incorporating members of the Bulgarian aristocracy into the ruling circles of Byzantium were laid. Some of Samuil's descendants were entrusted with responsible positions in Constantinople and the eastern provinces, while others were related through marriages to the Byzantine aristocracy.

The other way to incorporate Bulgarians into imperial structures, which involved a wider sphere of people, was to recruit them into the Byzantine army, as was the practice with all subjects. In its time this amounted to participation in the public life of the Empire. Thus Bulgarians were given career opportunities and could, according to their qualities and the merits shown on the battlefield, advance in the Byzantine hierarchy. A serious attempt was made to involve Bulgarians in the overall resources of the Empire.

But before these measures had any effect, in the middle of the 11th century Byzantium was shaken by a deep crisis. Asia Minor, which had for centuries been the centre of the Empire's vitality was turned into a battlefield. In Southern Italy, on the pass to ancient Rome, the last Byzantine possessions, too, were the target of incessant warfare. The wars consumed enormous sums raised by the emperors through increased taxation. This most simple policy of filling the coffers could, as the Balkan experience showed, prove quite dangerous.

All subjects were discontent with the uncontrolled rise of taxes but in the Bulgarian lands, the dissatisfaction grew into rebellion. It started in 1040 in the Morava valley and was led by Petur

Delyan, later proclaimed 'king of Bulgaria' in Belgrade. Within a short period the rebellion encompassed considerable territories (from the Danube to Salonica and Northern Greece), thus putting to the test the stability of Byzantine rule over the Balkans. Almost a year was needed to suppress it. Over different periods after 1041 a series of riots covered the Bulgarian lands, which, though starting as protests against arbitrary tax collecting, often grew into movements for the restoration of the Bulgarian kingdom.

The successful incorporation of Bulgarians into the Empire became impossible towards the middle of the 11th century. The application of time-honoured political means faced the Byzantine emperors with the fully real threat of turning the peninsula into a dangerous zone. Their failures even better highlighted the necessity to work out a new Bulgarian policy.

## **C** The Bulgarian dynamic

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As in all Orthodox societies, the Church in Bulgaria played a very special role. The parish priest's care for his congregation\* encompassed so large a spectrum of activities that the parish church itself was conceived of as the natural focus of social life. Approaching the priest for traditional church practices or a blessing at each crucial moment of their life, the Bulgarians also frequently asked him to settle property and legal issues.

Bulgarian culture owes a debt of gratitude to local priests, the foundation of the church hierarchy, for their large role in the unabating literary activity of the time. During this time of Byzantine rule, Old Bulgarian literature was enriched with a number of saints' lives and new texts dedicated to the first teachers of Slavdom. The church homily was further developed and adapted



to the needs of Bulgarians forced to live under Byzantine dominance. The local Bulgarian church took great pains to base education and morality on Christian values. This united Bulgarian society and consolidated its interrelations. It also sharpened all the problems of this historical period.

In the 11th-12th centuries the Bulgarian attitude to the Byzantine was controversial. On the one hand, the high achievements of Byzantine culture and Byzantium's position of instructor in the faith could not but stir admiration. On the other, there was the discontent of the subjected. If this duality stayed in balance with the representatives of the educated elite, the common people seemed rather to feel hatred for the new lords. The hate of the subjugated disguised itself as extreme piety with Bulgarians who – as the Apocrypha, beloved reading with the lower classes, had it – were a “chosen people” and the most zealous of Christians. Though Byzantine in origin, the Apocrypha were filled with great exempla from the Bulgarian past and quite adequately reflected the Bulgarian cast of mind. The danger of such attitudes was in the fact that the Bulgarians badly needed an enemy to set in relief their own advantages. Even when the Bulgarian and Byzantine societies would follow their own courses of development, the traces of this radical attitude would still mark their relations.

The enormous interest in the Apocrypha was due not only to their evidence of the Bulgarian past. The simple language and the abundance of detail, spurious as sources could be, satisfied the great curiosity of uneducated Christians. The fact that these texts were uncanonical was negligible compared to the possibility of learning from them the lives and fortunes of sacred Biblical personages. And the passion for such knowledge was great. Though it was sporadic and wore the crude image of poverty, it fired the

faith of the largest social stratum, the low classes of society.

The vast dissemination of the Apocrypha in Bulgarian was also due to the fact that Bulgarians were growing in number. In the beginning of the 12th century Bulgarian society underwent a demographic boom which favorably affected the economic appropriation of mountainous regions.

Nomadic raids into the lands north of the Balkan range increased. Contrary to reason the invasion of Uzes and Pechenegs, and of Kumans in mid-12th century, did not bring about any severe economic cataclysms. What is more, at the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th centuries the age's chroniclers no longer even mentioned the names of these nomadic tribes. This was a sure measure of their successful integration into Bulgarian society and proof of the vitality of Bulgarian culture, capable of accepting the challenge of the unknown and assimilating it. This shaped the dynamic of Bulgarian society.

## **D** Bulgarians and the other

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In the early 12th century Byzantium was slowly emerging from a crisis. The policy of the emperors of the Comneni dynasty (1081-1185) was already bearing fruit. Military victories and diplomatic steps guaranteed the necessary stability to the Empire, along with a political policy that regarded the Balkan provinces as Byzantium's heart under the new circumstances. A remarkably favourable period of new possibilities for cultural and social exchange commenced.

Amongst the age's most interesting monuments is the Bachkovo Monastery. Founded in 1083 by the Armenian Gregory Pakouriani, supreme commander of the Byzantine emperor's western armies, it still preserves in its crypt the frescoes



of the Georgian masters who decorated it. The subjects, technique, and colours resemble the remarkable art of Byzantium's capital. As a whole, from the 12th century the monastery became part of the cultural and religious life of Bulgaria. Thus the interaction of several cultures resulted in the birth of this exceptional monument of Orthodoxy. But its most important message to Bulgarians was that they should feel quite comfortable within the high cultural standards of the age, understanding, appropriating, and adapting according to their needs: experiencing themselves as an integral part of the rich and varied Orthodox culture.

The policy of integrating Bulgarians into the Empire gave them the great chance to establish close contacts with advanced Byzantine urban culture. The Bulgarian was living within the uncommonly vast horizon of the Empire. He moved freely within a spacious world which had everything in itself. Even if he lived in the country, he could easily travel to the city, where neither tradition nor the Empire's law made him feel different from the burgers. If he lived in the city, the Bulgarian was used to cohabiting with a variety of other ethnic groups. In the imperial city Byzantines, Armenians, Jews, Moslems, Catholics and Orthodox Christians lived in districts situated around their temples and, in the name of their common interests, they were compelled to forget their religious quarrels and avoid infringing upon others' rights.

A person whose name remains in the annals of both Bulgarian and Byz-

antine history was Theophylact, archbishop of Ohrid in the late 11th century. In his personal correspondence he freely expressed his contemptuous feeling for the Bulgarians, through which one can easily recognize the old Hellenic attitude of supremacy over barbarians. But Theophylact would not have been a true Byzantine, had he not successfully combined in his personality aristocratic sentiment with the sincerest sentiment of the cleric. There is not the slightest formalism or pretence in his care for his Christian flock, who were these same Bulgarians. This amazing man wrote the most remarkable life of St. Kliment Ohridski, which forever associated him with medieval Bulgarian literature. But this life was written in Greek! Where did Theophylact actually belong?

The overall everyday life of the Balkan city naturally resulted in integration, the outcome of the constant exchange of ideas, modes of conduct, literary techniques, and images. Its indelible imprint can be seen to this day in the marvelous frescoes of Ohrid and Nerezi (now in Macedonia), which preserve the memory of the Bulgarian masters of the time.

Contacts also entailed difficulties, misunderstandings, contradictions. But behind them was a cultural dialogue, whose participants had to speak to one another. It was this dialogue which gave birth to a common culture, the culture of Orthodoxy, the shared possession of Bulgarians and Byzantines.

## **CHECK-UP**

- 1. Why did the Balkans become a guarantee of Byzantium's future ?*
- 2. How did the emperors incorporate the Bulgarians into Byzantium?*
- 3. Explain the ambiguous relations between Bulgarians and Byzantines, and give the conditions that affected them.*
- 4. What helped the Bulgarian nation survive ?*



## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Career of an Heir Apparent**

The last Bulgarian ruler of the 11th century was undoubtedly a precious decoration to Basil II's triumph in 1019, after the defeat of the Bulgarians. The Emperor took to Constantinople Tsar Ivan Vladislav (1015-1018) together with his whole family: his wife, Maria, and his 12 children. They all received titles, and in time the family of Ivan Vladislav became one of the noblest in the Byzantine capital. For several generations the ladies would be closely related to the emperor's court: Maria became a lady-in-waiting, while one of her daughters, Ekaterina, was married to Isaak Comneni (1057-1079) and was empress of Byzantium in the middle of the 11th century. Another empress was Irina, Ivan Vladislav's granddaughter, married to the famous Alexius I Comneni.

Ivan Vladislav's first-born son, Presian, the Bulgarian heir apparent, had a most interesting fate. He was honoured with the title of Magister and received the important position of a ruler of an Asia Minor province, where he became famous for his skills as a war general. A decade later he participated in a debate over the throne of Constantinople, which had a most peculiar prehistory.

In 1025 Basil II died and his brother, Constantine VIII, a poor shadow of his great predecessor, ascended to the throne. The new emperor had a serious problem – God had given him only daughters: Eudoxa, Zoe, and Theodora. To have a claim to the throne, they had to marry. The eldest was a nun, the youngest was not among the greatest of Constantinople's beauties, so the

chances of Zoe, the second daughter were most obvious. Although ageing, she was, according to chroniclers, quite attractive. So her father succeeded in marrying her off to Romanus-Argyr, Constantinople's energetic eparch (ruler) at the time.

In 1028 Constantine VIII died and the aging couple ascended to the throne. The Byzantine capital witnessed one of the most riotous family stories at the emperors' court. The emperor Romanus III Argyr wanted a child by all means, to procure an heir to the throne. According to the annalist, Ioan Zonaras, "Romanus expected to live long and rule long ... He could not believe that the empress who was 50... was unable to give him heirs and thus worked hotly to achieve a result. He even used certain herbs, and made his wife wear certain amulets which could help her become fruitful."

Soon the amorous failures of the 60 year-old bridegroom became known to his subjects and made him target of the citizens' sneers. The emperors' impaired image was an important argument with the plotters of Romanus III's overthrow. Among these was Magister Presian. One could only guess at the role he was to play should plotters have succeeded, remembering his attempts to marry the empress's younger sister, Theodora. The plot, however, was discovered. Theodora was sent to a nunnery while Presian was blinded, wearing the rest of his days the mark of his audacity. A year later his traces were lost. What remained was the memory of yet another Bulgarian who had aspired for the Byzantine imperial throne.



## 29

THE MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS:  
THE 13TH CENTURY**A** The escalation  
of conflict

At the end of the 11th century Byzantium was forced to abandon its traditional policy of "brilliant isolation". The extreme mobilization of forces imposed by the Comneni made it possible for the Empire to solve many problems, thus skillfully combining its own forces with some outside help. The constant need of a fleet, army, and allies opened Byzantine doors wide for seafaring Venetians and Genoese, hired soldiers (Russians, Normans, French, Alans, Georgians), and the knights-crusaders who passed en route to the holy places.

The size and glamour of the Byzantine capital struck people, since for them a big town had about ten thousand inhabitants and a few imposing buildings. Even by today's standards Constantinople was a huge city with its population of 500, 000 inhabitants, which was temperamental and noisy in a typically southern way! People moved hurriedly through a large urban area locked behind a triple fortified wall and full of architectural masterpieces from several epochs. The palaces of the Byzantine nobles competed with the few imperial palaces in beauty. The St. Sophia Church shed its magnificence on the whole city, in which there were dozens of churches and over thirty monasteries. All this was covered in the splendour and magnificence of

antique statues and columns, gathered together from all over the world. But for medieval man the city's most precious possession were the holy relics. Constantinople was a treasury of relics: pieces/fragments of the true cross, the crown of thorns of Jesus, the nails with which he had been nailed, the pall with which he had been covered, the spear with which he had been pierced, not counting the relics of the saints: a real "earhly Jerusalem".

Such architecture aroused a desire for imitation. In the middle of the 12th century the Norman king, Roger II, erected in Palermo his palace and the church "Santa Maria". Their outer look was Norman – the church looked like a fortress – but its inside was Byzantine in technique as well as subject matter. In the anteroom of the church a beautiful mosaic depicted the humble Norman King Roger II, with his head bent down to Jesus Christ. Naturally, the inscriptions showed that it was all about a Norman king and not a Byzantine Emperor. Behind the brilliant imitation one could perceive the envy of the warlike and poor barbarian for the wealthy, civilized Byzantine world.

Very often the envy burst out into an immediate conflict. In 1147 a big Norman army under the command of same Roger II devastated continental Greece. Among the spoils that the Norman king took with him to Palermo was the silk industry. After conquering the town of Thebes, the Normans carefully dismantled the silk



workshops and sent them, together with the captured masters, to Sicily. In this way the West gained the so jealously guarded secret of silk from Byzantium. It also fueled a Western hatred for the "Greeks" (never Romaioi), weak in war and sated with luxury, unjustly possessing the wealth of the Christian East.

But the West's hatred was answered with Byzantine disgust. Anna Comnena, who had seen the participants in the First Crusade, described them as tough and treacherous, haughty and simple barbarians, who, on top of everything, caused inconvenience to the Byzantines with their bad smells and hygiene, which had been unknown to them. The Byzantines had put a lot of insult in the name they called the people of the West: "Latins" (never "Christians," as they called themselves). But behind that insult lurked some hidden fear, because at that time Byzantium couldn't do without the Latins. The success of the Comneni was due to the Italian fleet as well as the Crusaders and the western knights, who had fought as mercenaries in the Byzantine army. And the Byzantine emperors had been forced to give in, and over time these concessions had become greater. This was the price of the imperial glamour in the 12th century. As early as the 11th century first the Venetian and then the Genoese merchants received special customs privileges. In the 12th century the Italians in Constantinople already lived in their own neighbourhoods that had been freed from the control of the city administration with a special emperor's decree. The fleet and the money of the Italians, so much necessary to Byzantium, had been bought by the Comneni by their denying themselves their imperial privileges. In this way the Emperors were forced to reach to the basis of Byzantine civilization: the principle that the law was valid for everyone. And this violation of legal order bore bad fruit soon enough.

A spirit of impugnyty haunted Byzantium and Constantinople at the end of the 12th century. The voice on the city street became more and more understandable. To the privileges and willfulness of the Italians, Byzantine commoners answered with a hatred which from the middle of the 12th century increasingly turned into open hostility. Having lost his respect for emperor's lack of impartial authority, the man in the street focused his long accumulated hostility against the Latins.

## **B** The crisis in Byzantium

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During 1180, after the death of Manuel I Comnenus, his under-aged son, Manuel II, was proclaimed Emperor. The Empress-mother Maria, a Norman, was at the head of the regency; her government inflamed even more the anti-Latin mood. In 1182 the enraged crowd rose against the regency and organized riots in the western merchants' neighborhoods. Arson, spontaneous violence, and much demagogy helped bring to the emperor's throne people whose most important quality was serving the mob's tastes.

Andronicus Comnenus (1183-1185) was the first of them. Foolhardy and unscrupulous in achieving his aims, he was a general favourite. Having become a regent of his 13-year old nephew, he didn't hesitate to drown him soon after that.

During the summer of 1185 a strong Norman army disembarked on the Balkans. The town of Drach (today's Durus) fell, and then Salonica. On their way to Constantinople the Norman knights organized an unprecedented slaughter of peaceful people. Facing that immediate threat, the city crowd forgot its favourite very soon. In September 1185 a new riot put on the throne Isaac Angel (1185-1195). The crowd literally tore Andronicus to pieces.



At the limit of his strength, the new Emperor succeeded in beating back the Normans from Constantinople. However, pushing the Normans finally out of the Balkans cost the Empire two whole years of unimaginable financial, military, and economic tension, which completely exhausted it. What had been built up by the Comnenes began to disappear.

The decline was first reflected in the Balkan provinces. In the beginning of 1186 a riot burst out in the Bulgarian lands – the key to the stability of the peninsula. Nothing described so well the deep crises of Byzantium as its incapability to deal with this riot, which initially was quite a limited one.

The Empire was deeply sunk in fights for the throne in which the emperor's power and prestige was being demolished. In 1195 Isaac Angel was dethroned and blinded by his brother – Alexius III (1195-1203).

Those who usurped the Byzantine throne at the end of the 12th century only had enough power to ascend it. Then followed an endless series of concessions and compromise.

Helped to the throne in the name of a resolute policy against the West, the emperors were soon forced to accept its conditions. The German Emperor went so far as to ask Alexius III for a huge ransom in gold, so that he wouldn't conquer what had remained of the Balkan provinces of Byzantium. However, Alexius III's treasury was empty. The attempt to impose a new tax sent the angry crowd into the street. And then he did something unheard of: he ordered all the gold, silver and jewels to be removed from the decorations on the emperor's tomb. In front of his amazed subjects the ruler himself desecrated the Empire's ancient symbols, thus striking the next severe blow against the emperor's prestige.

The authority of the main power fell together with its ability to control the vast

provinces. Behind the frequent local riots were seen strong separate tendencies. The provincial administration appropriated more and more imperial rights, and challenged the emperor's right to dictate his conditions. Byzantium disintegrated into relatively independent little worlds. There was nothing more dangerous at that time, when it was surrounded by ambitious enemies with claims on Constantinople.



## Restoration of the Bulgarian kingdom

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When in the beginning of 1186 the Bulgarian riot broke out, it looked like the next link in the chain of internal Byzantine problems. Its leaders were two Bulgarians – the brothers Teodor and Asen. They didn't have enough forces but followed a good tactic and had the advantage of a unifying idea: the restoration of the Bulgarian kingdom. The elder brother, Teodor, had been proclaimed a king of the Bulgarians in Turnovo under the name of Petur. Having begun as a limited local riot, the Bulgarian rebellion received increasing support thanks to the fact that St. Dimitar of Salonica protected the rebels. According to his contemporaries he deprived the Byzantines of his good will because of their many sins. For two whole years Emperor Isaac Angel made attempts to restore Byzantine authority. Sometimes he himself led the march against the Bulgarians. But the main forces of the Empire were busy with the Normans and successes against the Bulgarians were not strong. In 1187 the Emperor was forced to stop the march to the North.. According to the signed truce the existence of a Bulgarian state in the lands between the Danube and the Balkan Range was recognized, and it also included the Zagore region in Thrace. Nevertheless, Bulgarian expansion continued under the lead-



ership of King Ivan I Assen (1187-1196), who came to the throne after Petur's withdrawal.

When at the end of the 1180s the Emperor made a new attempt to direct his forces to Bulgaria it was already too late. Turnovo was a solid capital and a seat of an independent Bulgarian archbishopric, sanctified notwithstanding the opinions of Ohrid and Constantinople. The chaos created by the Crusaders' advance during the Third Crusade was used by the Bulgarians to continue their territorial expansion. By 1195 the Belgrade and Branichevo region, Melnik, and many others strongholds along the lower Struma River were in Bulgarian hands.

It was obvious that imperial military forces could not solve the Bulgarian problem. Paralyzed by separatism, it didn't have any other weapon except the plotting assassinations. The murders of Asen and Petur aimed to provoke inside turmoil. This rather insecure way to cope with its western enemy disclosed the helplessness of Byzantium and didn't at all achieve the desired aim. Power passed into the hands of the third Asenid, Kaloyan (1197-1207).

Kaloyan continued economical and effective military operations. In 1202 the new emperor, Alexius III, was forced to sign a peace treaty with which he recognized the major part of Kaloyan's conquests. After that Bulgarian efforts were directed to the southwest, where their actions were facilitated by the invasion of the armies of the Fourth Crusade.

Part of Kaloyan's tactics in exploiting contradictions between Byzantine and the West were his negotiations for a union with the Pope. He prolonged them for five years with the purpose of making the best use of the political situation. After the fall of Constantinople in April 1204, the situation changed radically. In November Kaloyan welcomed

the apostolic legates who brought him the king's crown and recognition for an independent Bulgarian church under the supremacy of Rome. Fashioned out of political expediency, in reality the union didn't have any specific results. Thus Catholicism was not imposed in Bulgaria and the pretensions of the Latin empire for Balkan domination disappeared before their most serious opponent – the Bulgarians. On 14 April 1205, under the walls of Odrin, the Latins suffered a catastrophic defeat, and Emperor Baldwin was forced to bear the shame of captivity in Turnovo.

For some time the death of Kaloyan stopped Bulgarian invasions, but the next Bulgarian rulers inevitably strove for dominance on the Balkans and among the Orthodox countries. What had been achieved by the first Asens strongly linked power in the Orthodox world with the name of the Bulgarians.

## **D** The fourth crusade

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Split by inner conflicts, the West was surprisingly united in its attitude to Byzantium. The German Emperor made claims for the Byzantine throne, the Pope wanted to subordinate the Orthodox church, and Venice was striving for new trade privileges to the detriment of its Italian competitors. In 1202 these interests crossed one another in Venice, where assembled the army of many thousands for the Fourth Crusade. The son of Isaac Angel, Alexius, came to the Crusaders to ask for help in order to get back the lost throne. He promised huge amounts of money, maintenance of the Crusaders' fleet, inclusion of Byzantine military troops in the Crusade, and even Constantinople Church's obedience to the Pope. All this was a good reason for the Crusade army to go to Egypt instead of the Byzantine capital. Alexius IV Angel



ascended the throne, but in order to pay only half of what was promised he had to empty up the Byzantine treasury. His attempts to collect the rest of the money from the Church and from special taxes met with resistance. Having lost their patience, on 12 April 1204 the Crusaders decided to get what was due and caused unprecedented ravages in Constantinople.

Like a ship during a storm, the Empire broke into small pieces. What was conquered by the crusaders was divided among them and in place of Byzantium there appeared the Latin empire, the Salonica kingdom, the Achean principality, and the Athenian dukedom. Emperor Baldwin ascended the throne in Constantinople (1204-1205), and the Venetian, Tomaso Morozini, became a patriarch; he immediately admitted that the Constantinople patriarchate was dependent on the Pope.

The crusaders were too few to gain full command of the conquered lands and their attempts to impose the feudal system met with resistance from the local populations who did not know serfdom. The persecution and humiliation to which Orthodox people had been

subjected, cut off all possibility for co-operation between the new masters and the old Byzantine elite.

The main parties in the struggle for the Byzantine legacy appeared to be the Bulgarians and the orthodox countries formed after the disintegration of Byzantium: Epirus, Nicaea and Trebizond. Differing circumstances lead differing rivals closer to the goal. The Nicaean empire had the best chance because of its position in the northwest part of Asia Minor, and it succeeded in escaping the devastation of the Crusaders. The Nicaean emperors managed to take maximum advantage of the economic and political situation and to build a stable central power and substantial military forces. One of the reasons for the success of the Nikean rulers was the fact that their lands were inhabited by a compact Greek population.

Gradually the idea for restoration of the brilliant orthodoxy began to be linked with the name of one of two nations. Both Bulgarians and Greeks pointed out a number of reasons because of which that important mission fell on them.

## **CHECK-UP**

- 1. What impressed the foreigners who came to Constantinople?*
- 2. Indicate the characteristics of the crisis that Byzantium underwent at the end of the XII century.*
- 3. What ways did the Asens seek for the official recognition of the restored Bulgarian state?*
- 4. How did the relationships with Western Europe influence the crisis in Byzantium? Please, describe the development of the conflict.*



## FACES OF HISTORY:

### **The valuable loot: Constantinople, 12 April 1204.**

On 12 April 1204 the Crusaders conquered Constantinople, the town that had never been conquered by any of its enemies: Persians, Arabs, Bulgarians. Duke Boniface of Monferrat gave his soldiers three days for plunder. During these three days the legendary wealth of the Byzantine capital had been plundered indiscriminately. Even the St. Sofia Church had not been spared. Nicetas Chouiates (13th century) described the plundering of the temple in the following way: "The holy analogion encrusted with jewellery which evoked amazement were cut into pieces and then divided among the soldiers together with the other beautiful objects. When the holy utensils had to be taken out of the temple... as well as all extremely valuable objects of the unusual art, the gold and the silver with which the chairs, the pulpit and the doors had been covered, they (the crusaders) pushed mules and horses into the anteroom of the temple... The animals didn't want to go in because they were afraid of the sparkling floor..." The Venetians, for example, loaded their ships, on top of everything else, with the bronze horses of the ancient sculptor, Lysippes, and decorated one of facade of the St. Marco Cathedral (Venice) with them. Many monuments of ancient art which western European museums are so proud of today had been taken from Constantinople in 1204.

The most precious part of the plunder, however, were the Christian relics which Constantinople was extremely rich in. Contemporary Byzantines who witnessed the

plundering of their capital never doubted that the Crusaders would be reached by God's anger. Indeed, sometimes the plunderers fell prey to the most inexplicable misfortunes. For example, the ship that carried the cloth bearing the image of Jesus, as if not made by a human hand, sunk..

On top of all that, Western Christians were deeply convinced that it was an utmost injustice for only one Christian town, even though the greatest, to possess such a wealth of holy relics. According to medieval images, touching a relic was considered the equivalent of protection, a sort of a talisman.. For those who had them, the relics had been a source of enormous energy, because they exuded some holiness.

A participant in the Fourth Crusade, Robert De Clary, completely shocked, described the numerous relics that the Crusaders saw in just one of the churches of the Emperor's palace:

"There we came across two parts of the real True Cross, as thick as a leg and half the length of a man. We also came across the iron top of the spear with which Jesus' rib had been pierced; and two nails with which his hands and feet had been nailed. We also found the tunic which had been taken off him when he had been led to the Golgotha. We also found the holy thorn wreath, with thorns as sharp as an iron awl. We also found part of the clothing of Virgin Mary and the head of John the Baptist and so many other relics which I simply couldn't describe."



## WORKSHOP:

### The two sides of one world: The East and the West

**Task No.1.** Evaluate your knowledge

Choose and try to define the level which you want to support:

#### Satisfactory

1. Give the names of three western rulers and three Byzantine emperors.
  - the beginning of the First Crusade
  - the restoration of the Bulgarian kingdom;
2. Mark the years of the following events:
  - the rebellion of Petur Delyan
  - 3. Describe the way that the Noble man of the west had walked to become a knight?

*(If you have successfully answered the questions above, you are obviously not satisfied with your previous term low mark. Don't forget, what you need this term is a 4. Try a question from the next higher level.)*

#### Good

1. Who is:  
Grigoriy VII    Rober Guiscard    Roger II
2. With what event are the following years associated?  
1072          1122          14.04.1205
3. What were the new things that Roman art brought to European culture? When answering, please consider the following: the basic building material; changes in church architecture; the interior decoration of the temple.

*(We believe you are convinced now that history is like a fairy tale full of heroes and adventures. If you find the very textbook boring though, you can always find a book about the Middle Ages among your books at home.)*

#### Excellent

1. Was Alexius Comnenus (1081-1118) a contemporary of:  
the speech of pope Urban II in Clermont  
Emperor Conrad III  
the Battle in Manzikert
2. With what event are the following years associated?    1066    1181    1204
3. Specify the elements of the ideal state according to eastern Christians: Byzantium. In your answers, please consider the following: the emperor's power; serving the state; Byzantine society.

*(Congratulations! You did it again! Now you can talk with your peers from all over Europe about their countries' past. Believe us, they will be pleasantly surprised and flattered by your knowledge.)*

**Task No.2.** Write down the answer to the following historical question:

What were the similarities and the differences between eastern and western societies in Europe during the medieval period?

In your answer you can follow the following suggested plan:

- \* Medieval society in Western Europe:
  - a society built on the basis of personal contact;
  - the functions of each of the classes in the life of the society: people who pray; people who fight; people who work.
- \* Medieval society in the Orthodox world:
  - the emperor's power;
  - the state and the society;
  - the civil servant.



## THE HERITAGE OF THE HOLY EMPIRE: THE BULGARIAN KINGDOM DURING THE 13TH CENTURY

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### **A** Bulgaria during the time of Ivan II Asen (1218-1241)

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During the 1220s, Epirus became the most powerful claimant for the Byzantine heritage among the orthodox states. Having occupied the lands of Epirus, Thessaly (today's Northern Greece), and the Drach region (today's Southern Albania), during the reign of Teodor Comnenus (1216-1230), Epirus significantly expanded its territory in Macedonia and Western Thrace. In 1224, during an official ceremony in Salonica, Teodor Comnenus was proclaimed an emperor by the archbishop of Ohrid. In this way he quite openly declared his claim for the throne in Constantinople. On the Balkans there existed only one force capable of challenging this claim: the Bulgarian kingdom.

During that time Ivan II Asen (1218-1241) was on the Bulgarian throne. The young Bulgarian tsar heritage was not at all a brilliant one. Nevertheless, during his first years of government he was not forced to be at war, and he had the chance to direct all his efforts into stabilizing the kingdom. So at the end of 1220s the Bulgarian kingdom appeared to be a strong state with

a final say in the struggle for Constantinople.

The rivalry burst out in a direct military conflict in 1230 when Epirus attacked Bulgaria. During the crucial battle on 9 March 1230 at Klokotnitsa, the army of Theodor Comnenus suffered a disastrous defeat, and he and his entire family were taken prisoners. After this Bulgarian victory Epirus was no longer a decisive claimant in the struggle for power in Constantinople. The triumphant march of Ivan II Asen joined all of Macedonia, Thrace, and the Albanian lands to the Bulgarian kingdom. In the beginning of the 1230s, under the government of the Bulgarian tsar there were subjects of various ethnic origin: Bulgarians, Greeks, Wallachians, Serbs, and Albanians. This change reflected also his title, which included the words "tsar of Bulgarians and Greeks".

The people around the king built a unified administration for the vast territories of the Bulgarian kingdom. As a whole, the government structure followed the Byzantine one, which explains the titles of many of the civil servants. Above them, regardless of rank and property, was the Bulgarian tsar. The Bulgarian lands were divided into several vast regions, called with the Byzantine name *chora*. These were subdivided into smaller administrative units. The



seat of the deputy, who governed on behalf of the tsar, was usually in the most significant town of the chora.

Archaeologists noticed that the number of treasures in Bulgarian lands from the 13th century was much smaller than from previous periods. This might mean that there had appeared better opportunities for using money, and life had become more stable. Safety and security during the Middle Ages was another explanation of economical health, because it allowed increased production by craftsmen and expanded trade.

In 1235, during a church convention in the town of Lampsak (Asia Minor), a number of high officials of the Orthodox church were called together. In the presence of Tsar Ivan II Asen the Bulgarian, ecclesiastical head Yoakim received an official recognition for his patriarchal rank from the Byzantine ecumenical patriarch and the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioche, and Jerusalem. The patriarchal dignity of the Bulgarian church had been restored. In this way the Bulgarian kingdom received an equal in dignity church centre.

## **B** The Tsar

One of the donor's charters of Ivan II Asen has been preserved together with the tsar's gold stamp. Portrayed in full length, the Bulgarian ruler has a globe in his left hand and is crowned with a cross – symbol of Christian power. A closer look at his portrait clearly reveals the ideology behind the power that changed Ivan II Asen into an example for all Bulgarian tsars. The brilliant gold and majestic cross presents to subjects the image of the ideal Orthodox ruler, “a tsar faithful to God and autocrat to the Bulgarians”, “by the grace of God” inspired for his exclusive mission.

In medieval Bulgarian society the king was assigned a central place. As regards each individual subject the king's power was unlimited. He could either give mercy or severely punish, “elevate the poor” or “disparage the rich,” give property or take it away. In the presence of such power, neither social nor property differences could have any significance. These royal rights were never questioned in medieval Bulgaria.

For the medieval Bulgarian, respect and homage to the tsar represented also meant respect and homage to Jesus Christ, the only source of power “in heaven as well as and on earth”. “There is no power, but that given by God”: these gospel words were literally interpreted by the Bulgarian tsar's subjects. God should save the world and the orthodox king couldn't be anything else but an instrument for realising this idea. To him God passed on part of his power over people and the world. And this power went beyond everything that human mind could reach, because it transcended time and space, life and death, everything visible and invisible. The Bulgarian king considered his most important duty to imitate God. The whole ritual of palace life resembled the secret connection between him and the Heavenly king.

Dressed in silk cloak, embroidered with gold and jewellery, the king bent his head only to God and the church. From the hands of the patriarch he received the king's crown – material symbol of God's power – and together with this, he lead his subjects, along with the Church, to salvation. His most important task was caring for the profession of the orthodox faith. For its implementation the Bulgarian tsar received his “sanctified sword”, which he could use only in protecting the Church, punishing heretics (i.e. rebels against God), and seeking victory against the infidels (enemies of God). All other legal rights (supreme administrative, legislative, military, and judicial power),



the Bulgarian ruler accepted as a means for accomplishing this duty.

The subjects of such a ruler couldn't belong to only one ethnic unit. According to the Bible they had to be gathered "from each clan and each tribe," so that they could unite all mankind. That was why when the Bulgarian tsar was titled "tsar of Bulgarians and Greeks", it was something more than political. His power as an orthodox ruler couldn't be of use to only one nation; his kingdom had to be universal, as should the Orthodox church. That's why the Bulgarian system of government was open to everyone who accepted its religion. This had greater impact after the restoration of the Bulgarian kingdom. Even more, it was then that the Comneni, converted to Christianity, could even have a chance for a more favourable career than the ethnic Bulgarian.

For the medieval Bulgarian the conclusion from such an ideology was clear. The power of the Bulgarian tsar was not only the first in the world but the only one, because it was received by the only God. Just the way that the Orthodox kingdom could be one only. During the 13th century, again, Bulgaria claimed to be the only Orthodox kingdom (empire).

The transfer of the support of St. Dimitar to the Bulgarian rulers was regarded as a sign from God, meaning that the mission of Byzantium in the Orthodox world was transferred to the Bulgarian kingdom. In the language of time, it meant that it fell on the Bulgarians to renovate the Orthodox empire and to gather together under its power the scattered Orthodox Christians.

## **C The Bulgarian society: the spirit of war**

The whole splendour of the Bulgarian capital was surrounded by inaccessible fortified walls. They played a key role during a time when war was a daily

routine on the Balkans. For two and a half centuries, during the Second Bulgarian kingdom, it took part in more than 100 wars. Contemporaries remembered the peaceful years as a happy exception.

The war for power over the Orthodox world changed the ethics of fighting in a special way. The practice of freeing prisoners-of-war and keeping only the eminent ones, widely praised by contemporary chroniclers, aimed to protect peaceful people. The sole purpose of war was gaining victory over the enemy, not wiping it out.

The spirit of war put its mark on social relationships. The civil service was looked upon as a military service, and the high offices in the kingdom were taken by people who owed their fame to military success. In this way new aristocracy formed consisting of extremely energetic people with the qualities of military commanders. In order to ensure success in the constant wars, the central power gave them more and more privileges. The closest associates of the king sometimes received substantial power in the government of their regions. When the tsar's power was strong there was no problem, in spite of their privileges, directing these individuals' energy to protecting the interests of the kingdom. However, when for one reason or another, the central power was unstable, then the privileges gained through the tsar's mercy changed these same people into a potential threat to the kingdom's unity.

The death of Ivan II Asen in 1241 put an end to the vigorous rise of the restored Bulgarian kingdom. For only fifteen years, during the government of his underaged sons, Kaliman I Asen (1241-1246) and Mihail II Asen (1246-1256), Bulgaria suffered serious failures, losing lands in Thrace, Macedonia, Wallachia. The obvious failures stirred up fights for the throne among various groups of the Bulgarian aristoc-



racy. In 1256-1257 this rivalry developed into a civil war.

All this was disastrous for the unity of the Bulgarian lands, given the unabating pressure of strong external enemies: Hungarians, Serbs, Byzantines. During the second half of the 13th cen-

tury they were joined by the Tartars, whose influence on the political life of the Bulgarians began to be felt stronger with the approach of the end of the 13th century; in 1299 a Tartar leader, Chaka (1299-1300), even took possession of the throne of the Asenids.

### **CHECK UP**

1. *What was the proportion of forces on the Balkan peninsula during the first half of the 13th century?*
2. *What type of model of government did Ivan II Asen build? Describe its elements.*
3. *Did the title of the Bulgarian ruler reflect his place in society? Give reasons.*
4. *How were the ethics of war during the 13th-14th century changed, and what was their impact on Bulgarian society?*
5. *Give the reasons why Bulgaria became a new centre of the Orthodox world.*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The New Tsarigrad – Turnovo**

The model for the Orthodox system of government had been created in Byzantium and couldn't be copied by other Orthodox states. Very often this imitation created exceptional drama. Together with the religion, the Bulgarians borrowed from Byzantium the ideology of the holy empire, according to which there could only be one Orthodox empire, governed by one only emperor, inspired by the only God. In the name of this aim the Bulgarian kings easily relinquished once conquered territories, and so the Bulgarian medieval state had very flexible boundaries. No conquered territories could be compared to the right to govern the whole Orthodox world on behalf of God. The struggle for this right could lead in only one direction: to Constantinople – the capital of Orthodoxy. In the images of the Bulgarians this city was "Tsarigrad" – i.e. "tsar of the towns" and "the town of the

tsars" – the only place, chosen by God, to govern the world from.

During the XIIIth century, Bulgarian aspirations for Constantinople had very serious arguments. The apostacy and sins of the Byzantines had been punished by heaven through the Roman victory. This shame could be erased only by freeing the holy town from the blasphemers-schismatics. During the 13th century under the government of Ivan II Asen, the Bulgarian kingdom was quite close to this goal. It was not by chance that on the king's gold coins was stamped a scene in which the tsar received his crown from St. Dimiter of Salonica – patron saint of all the Asens, who had left the Byzantines because of their numerous sins.

After the death of Ivan II Asen, Bulgarian possession of Constantinople was more of a dream than a real possibility. In 1261 the Nicacan emperors managed to



restore Byzantium. But they had negotiated with the Pope and were even inclined to compromise with the Orthodox church in the name of earthly political aims. Against their apostasy the Bulgarian tsars raised the idea of the "new Tsarigrad." In this idea the imperial mission had been transferred to the Bulgarian kingdom, and God had taken the holy town from the Byzantine apostates in order to give it to the most pious Orthodox people: the Bulgarians. This completely matched the religious image of the empire for the medieval Bulgarian: the old town of Tsarigrad had fallen because of trespasses in the true faith, and so Bulgaria contained the "new Tsarigrad".

The Bulgarian capital became a model of this completely formed ideology in the late 13th century and early 14th century. Although the size and natural wealth of Turnovo were much more modest, there was one aspiration built into both capitals. High above, in Tsarevets, were erected the tsar's palaces and the patriarch's residency: beautiful, massive, and solid, surrounded by their

own fortifications and visible from all sides, so that no one could ever doubt the authority of the Bulgarian ruler and the Bulgarian church. In the lower parts of Tsarevets as well as on the slopes of Trapezitsa spread the various city neighbourhoods, into which one could easily distinguish the rich houses of the Boyars and the dozens of church domes.

The most precious things in the capital of the Asens were the relics of the Christian saints which, together with the inhabitants' piety, underlined its holy meaning. During various periods the Bulgarian kings carried to Turnovo the relics of St Ivan Rilski, St. Ilarion Muglenski, St. Mihail Voin, St Ioan Polivotski, St. Filoteya, and St. Petka. And every new church erected meant new relics because the saints were the true protectors of the capital. All these changed Turnovo into a "second according to fame and deeds centre of the Orthodoxy". It was called a "New Tsarigrad" and orthodox Christians came from all over to pay respect to the relics of the saints.

## CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

# 31

### FROM THE DANUBE TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN: THE WORLD OF GREAT STEPPE (13TH – 15TH CENTURY)

#### **A** The Bulgarian kingdom and the Tartars

The regal ambitions of Bulgarian tsar Constantine Tih Asen (1257–1277) seemed doomed. During his reign there were gruelling wars in the south against

the Byzantines and in the northwest against the Hungarians. However, nothing could compare with the Tartars who invaded the Bulgarian territories in 1273 and from that time, became a constant threat from the north. Their ravaging attacks escalated tension in the kingdom. The diminishing authority of the tsar



created uncertainty: a favourable condition for civil wars and the ambitions of nobodies, determined adventurers with few moral restrictions.

Such an adventurer was Ivailo. He succeeded where the tsar's army had failed – namely, in beating the Tartars. As the kingdom became more and more vulnerable, to an increasing number of Bulgarians Ivailo's success looked like a proof that God had chosen him as ruler of Bulgaria. Ivailo's army was comprised of men of all ages, status, and motives, brought together by the common principle of following their leader at all costs. In 1277 Ivailo led his army to Turnovo. In the escalating civil war Ivailo not only managed to defeat the tsar's army but also brutally killed the king himself.

In the meantime came the news that Byzantium was again attacking in the south. Compared to the approaching peril, the insurrection became a question of lesser significance. In the spring of 1278 Ivailo was let into the capital Turnovo and the Asenevtsi palace as a husband of the widow queen. Circumstances, however, prevented him from savouring his success. He was to immediately lead the Bulgarian army to the North where the Tartars were advancing steadily. The end of the same year marked the beginning of a series of defeats for the invincible Ivailo.

Questions concerning Ivailo's right to rule began to be raised again. The crisis deepened in early 1279 when the grandson of Ivan II Asen, crowned in Constantinople as the Bulgarian tsar, stood outside Turnovo. It had no choice but to open the gates for Ivan III Asen even though this meant letting in the army of his father-in-law, the Byzantine emperor. This explains the support Ivailo received from a number of Bulgarians when, desperate to regain the crown at any cost, he allied himself with the Tartars. It seemed that anything was better than letting Byzantines freely traverse Bulgarian territories.

In the summer of 1279 the echo of Ivailo's victories against Byzantine was so strong that all it took to cause Ivan III Asen to flee was the rumour of a boyars' conspiracy. Georgi Terter (1280-1292), the most influential boyar in Turnovo, was crowned tsar. Under those circumstances only Tartar support could grant Ivailo the crown. And his ambitions took him to their chieftain, Nogai. But instead of support the great adventurer found his death there. And so ended the career of this extraordinary man who had exceptional personal qualities but who, unfortunately for him, threw all his energy to one purpose: the crown. He left behind many legends and also the unfortunate Tartar habit of interfering in the affairs of the Bulgarian kingdom. Georgi Terter was even forced to send his son, Teodor Svetoslav, as a hostage in the Tartars' camp and his daughter, as a wife to Chaka, the chief-in-commander and Nogai's son.

This humiliation of the Bulgarian tsar clearly showed the state of the centralized government. At the end of the 13th century its diminishing authority created a wave of separatism. Powerful local boyars established independent governments in the territories given to them. Their policy, dictated by their own interests, was not always the kingdom's. If it helped the interests of the local boyar, even an alliance with the Tartars was acceptable. That was why the tsar in Turnovo had no real support from his boyars. And as a result in 1300 this strong separatism led to Chaka's ascending the Bulgarian throne.

The same year Teodor Svetoslav (1300-1322) paid for peace with the Tartars with Chaka's head. The Tartars' khan, an old enemy of Chaka, even rewarded the new Bulgarian tsar with territories north of the Danube. This marked a new period of peaceful relationships with the fearsome northern neighbours. As a result Teodor Svetoslav was able to stabilize his kingdom by fighting the boyars' separatism and Byzantium.



In the early fourteenth century Mihail III Shishman (1323-1330), a powerful boyar from Vidin and an Asenovtsi relative, became tsar in Turnovo. Part of his power came from the picturesque Tartar mercenary troops who fought in his army. In 1330, during Mihail Shishman's last battle near Velbuzd (today Kyustendil) the Tartars, extraordinarily loyal and valiant, fought for the Bulgarian tsar to the end, protecting him with their bodies. Unfortunately the war favoured the Serbs. A new power was rising on the Balkans.

## **B** The world of the Mongols

The Tartars who in the thirteenth century so strongly influenced the Bulgarians were in fact only one of many tribes in the Mongol empire, which then spread from the South-Russian steppes to the Pacific Ocean. But in the 11th-12th centuries Mongol tribes inhabited the far eastern part of the Great Steppe: the regions between the rivers Enisei and Amur. For a few decades in the early 13th century, they managed to take control of the steppe connecting Europe and Asia – the greatest achievement since Attila. What was the secret?

Mongol society was a typical nomadic society. Its basic unit was the clan, a tightly knit community of many families, because in the great steppe survival depended on numbers. The clan was ruled by an elite who had special authority granted by the families' representatives. The elite consisted of noions, the eldest and most respected people of the clan, and bagaturs, the honorable warriors responsible for the clan's safety. The big responsibilities that the clan took included common possessions, blood vengeance, and the cult of predecessors. For the Mongols the clan was the basis for social life in which the fate of the individual was governed by the

group. In the vast steppe territories only the one that attracted the greater number of people would survive. For the Mongol, land was nothing; man was everything. The steppe man was always ready to obey the will of the group.

Contrary to popular beliefs, the Mongols were neither poor nor wild. They had big flocks and impressive art in small forms: metal and wooden figures with detailed ornaments, special clothes, decoration tradition, and a range of colours uncommon to the European eye – in other words, everything that was possible to take in the vast steppe.

When people were few, one learned to value what was different in the other person, provided that he wouldn't threaten you. In the 12th-13th centuries the religious beliefs of the Mongol tribes were various, from the primitive forms of shamanism to the religious study of Buddhism and Christianity. In the Tartars' history, however, religion had never been the cause for conflicts. Regardless of your religion, if you obeyed the laws of loyalty and valour you would be welcomed in the Mongol camp. That was why most Mongols followed the Bon (Sky) religion. The supreme deity was Mizir (the Tibetan name of Mitra), patron of the classic virtues of the warrior, loyalty and valour. Nothing was worse, however, than not keeping a promise. In those cases the infamous cruelty of the Mongols could be seen who, for one Tartar ambassador killed, could demolish a whole city. This cruelty astonished most of the Europeans of the time.

The people and possessions of a clan were called by the Mongols "ulus." Individual initiative and exceptional qualities could gain you "ulus" too. The way to the top for such a man was impossible without his "friends" (nukers) who obeyed him without reserve. The nukers could belong to different clans and tribes but the warrior's oath bound them together. In return for his loyalty the nuker received a part of everything the leader had won with



his sword and brains. In the twelfth century this exceptional dynamism combined with favourable weather conditions and population growth, heated up dangerous conflicts among the inhabitants of the steppes. The one who could control them could conquer the world.

Such a man was Temujin. When he was born in 1162 he owned nothing but himself. He won his first nikers due to his personal qualities and then his power began to spread. By the end of the 12th century Temujin was one of the most powerful Mongol chiefs. He offered the constantly warring clans unity under his own command. What he also offered was a law called 'yasa'. Designed to prevent blood vengeance, it was to be obeyed by everyone. It was clear, of course, that for the soldier the most persuasive argument was force. And it was Temujin's victories that were responsible for the gathering of the Great Council "Kurultai" – a meeting of all chiefs of the tribes living in a tent. There the yasa was proclaimed a divine law and Temujin, a Great Khan. His name was now Genghis Khan (1206-1227) and together with his name he had a new mission: to spread the yasa over the whole world which he had received as 'ulus' from the Sky. And so the basic principles of the future empire were marked.



## The Mongol Empire

Genghis Khan managed not only to unite the Mongol tribes in one centralized government but to prove the empire's vitality by conquering the greater part of Asia. The Mongol invasion was like an unexpected monsoon that swept everything on its way. And that monsoon blew in three different directions: in the east to China, in the south to Central Asia and India, and in the west to Europe. The one who yielded and paid tax was spared but woe betide the one who tried to fight.

That was the dismal fate of the Russian-Kuman forces in 1224 – one of their first fights with the Mongols near the river Kalka in the South Russian steppes.

After Genghis's death the Mongols controlled an enormous territory. Their empire comprised lands that had never been connected geographically, historically and economically, and the success of their government depended on maintaining the unity. The empire's land was divided into four sections—the number of Genghis's sons—but according to his will only the Great Khan had the supreme authority. The Great Khan was chosen among Genghis's clan.

Genghis's third son, Ogodei (1229-1241), was the chosen khan. He governed with the help of his nikers and the communication network that ensured connections with the subjects throughout the empire. A strict tax system was developed and for its effective implementation the Mongols did something that is difficult even today: they took a census. The efficient communications by post enabled the taxmen to perform their duties.

In 1235 a new Great Council resolved to continue conquering the world. Considerable forces were sent against Europe. In 1237-1241 Batu, Genghis Khan's grandson, with an army of 150,000 soldiers conquered the South Russian steppe and reached Central Europe.

Unable to fight the strong enemy, Europe was most unexpectedly saved by the wars for supreme power that flared up after Ogodei's death in 1241. Batu retreated in order to participate in the wars. Genghis Khan's will highlighted the fact that everyone belonging to his clan could claim the title of Great Khan. However, his heirs were too many and too ambitious. And so, ironically, the principle of the best man having the supreme power became tragically reversed.

Another factor disturbed the union of the Mongol empire. In mid-13th cen-



ture different stages of development in the particular parts of the empire were easily seen. That process was sped up by the Mongol's ability to adapt to peculiarities of the local culture. As they comprised only 1% of the empire's population this ability was vital for their survival, and their advantage in the government was extremely fragile. At the same time their religious tolerance made them accept the beliefs of the conquered people, which threatened their common identity – the basis of Mongol unity.

The different religions gradually began to tip the balance between the centralized power and the local uluses. In the mid-13th century even the Great Khan Kublai took up the Buddhism and added another name to his title: Emperor of China. It is difficult to say which one he valued more but it was certain that the brilliance of China and the rise of Beijing in the Middle Ages was connected with the Yuan dynasty, the foundations of which were laid by Hubilai.

A particularly interesting example for the development of contacts with the local culture was the fate of the Mongol state in the South Russian steppes. This area was the ulus of Genghis's first son, Djuchi, later known as the land of the Golden Horde. The Golden Horde controlled important economic crossroads in the lower Volga River valley, and in the middle of the 13th century it founded a separate country. During the reign of Khan Berke (1257-1266) there was considerable economic growth and Sarai became the capital.

However, there were a lot of cultural and religious conflicts in the lands of the Golden Horde. Islamic populations lived in the most prosperous areas but the religion of the majority of the population was Russian Orthodox. The rise of Islam resulting from economic growth was strongly resisted by the Eastern Orthodox Church, which had support from a large number of the ruling Mongol elite. After

Berke's death and the ascension of the Muslim, Nogai, to the throne, at the end of the fourteenth century, Islam became the official religion. That marked the end of religious tolerance as well as the disintegration of the Golden Horde. But it was in the religious wars against Islam that the Moscow Principality, rising in the mid-14th century, found its strength.

## **D** The rise of Moscow Russia and the end of the western expansion

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By accepting Christianity at the end of the tenth century, Russia became part of the European economic, political and religious world. The capital, Kiev, with its Orthodox church, "St. Sofia", was the governing body.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries civil conflicts, brought about by the tradition of dividing the prince's land to all sons after his death, diminished the strength of Kievan Russia. The wars among the princes in the early 13th century created favourable conditions for the German and Scandinavian invasions, which were part of the eastern expansion of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1202 Riga (today Latvia) was turned into a centre of the Catholic knights orders: a formidable power at the time.

The Tartar invasion in 1237-1240 completely destroyed Kievan Russia. The south principalities were most seriously affected while the northwest ones, united in the Great Vladimir Principality, had to pay for their relative independence with a special tax. In order to guarantee their tax, the invaders made special provisions that restricted civil conflicts. A special document guaranteed the rights of "the Great prince Vladimir and whole Russia" against the ambitions of all other Russian princes. By being loyal to the Mongols, Vladimir was able to focus on and repel the Catholic expansion. That was the strategy followed by



Alexander Nevski and in the 13th century, he defeated the Catholics – the Swedish knights – near the River Neva, and the German knights near the Chudsko Lake. It was clear that this strategy would ensure control over Russia.

After the death of Alexander Nevski in 1263 one of his sons, Daniil Aleksandrovich, inherited the small Moscow principality and became the founder of the great Moscow princes. They followed best of all Alexander Nevski's policy and kept peaceful relations with the Tartars. In turn they were the ones who received the "iarluk" for the "great princes" – a special paper of authority given to the Moscow rulers, and thus they avoided the previously difficult transition from one prince to the next.

As a result the Moscow principality became a competent centre of power in Russia and continued to fight the Catholic expansion. The principality had the complete support of the Orthodox church that, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, made Moscow the capital of the Russian metropolitans. By its end the Moscow principality was already an indisputable centre of the Russian Orthodox religion, and when the Russian princes began their struggle for breaking away from the Golden Horde, they had the

full support of the church in the name of Bishop Alexey and the distinguished hermit, St Sergiy Radonezhki.

The victory of Dmitri Donski (1359-1389) in Kulikovo pole in 1380 was the first of a long series of military victories over the next hundred years. Ivan III Vasilievich (1462-1505) broke the dependence on the Golden Horde forever. During his invasions he also began to establish a centralized government. The aim of the Russian princes was western expansion to stop the spread of the Catholic religion, despite the fact that expansion to the east was practically unlimited. The alliance between the Russian monarchy and the Church in the 15th century was such a strong one that when, in 1439, the Russian prince de-throned Bishop Isidor because of his support for the union, the whole Russian Orthodox church supported his actions.

A step divided the Russian princes from their ruling the Orthodox empire, and it was made by the alliance between Ivan III and the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, Zoe Paleologus. She brought to Russia the spirit of the Byzantine empire. To the contemporaries of the time Moscow was considered "The Third Rome" and there would not be a fourth one. The expansion of the Roman church to the East was stopped forever.

## CHECK UP

1. Give the characteristics of the crisis that Bulgaria experienced during the second half of the 13th century. What was the role of the Tartars in it?
2. Explain the structure of Mongol society. Compare it with other nomadic societies that you are already acquainted with.
3. How were the vast territories of the Mongol empire governed and what was its stability based on?
4. How did dependence on the Mongols help the Great Russian principality in its development? What were the consequences for Europe?



## 32

## THE TOWN AND ITS INHABITANTS

**A** Revival of trade

The increase in population and economic production provoked a revival in European trade in the beginning of the 12th century. There appeared professional tradesmen, who spent their life on the road between two market places. The agrarian European west represented a huge market for such everyday products as salt, wine, honey, iron instruments, or objects of luxury: utensils, jewellery, silk, spices, fragrances.

A major part of these goods came from the east, which was why the trade revival was first noticed in the Italian harbour towns: Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Ancona. The ships that used to transport Crusaders or were hired by the Byzantine emperor for military campaigns came back full of exotic eastern goods. Little by little "the holy war" in the East was changed into a financial initiative. From Italian harbours the goods passed through the Alps to central and northern Europe.

Another type of trade flourished in the North, not that varied, but not less effective. Its main ways could be traced along the big Russian rivers from the Baltic coast to Constantinople, the gate to the East. Marked by a series of harbours, this route led to the big marketplace in the town of Bruges. People from everywhere came there to

buy fish, Russian honey and furs, English wool, Flemish materials, and Eastern spices and silk.

The roads between the north and the south coasts of western Europe joined in towns in the district of Champagne (in Northern France). There every year, under the patronage of the Counts of Champagne, big fairs were organised. The fair started with an "exhibition" that lasted for the first eight days. The next thirty days were devoted to "sales" which were similar to our 'negotiations/contracts'. All payments were made during the ten days after the closing of the sales. Above this huge exchange the Lombards were on their guard – competent in financial matters and credit.

An additional stimulus for trade in the West was the flow of precious metals in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. Minting your own coins became a mark of prosperity and prestige. Florence minted florins (1252) and Venice, dukats (1284); these gradually replaced the Byzantine nomisma, "the dollar of the Middle Ages", in Western markets.

**B** Revival of the towns

The consequences of the revival in trade were first felt in the big harbour towns along the coasts of the Mediterranean and Northern Sea. They were felt, little by little, in the interior



of the continent along trade routes. In the 12th century they formed a well-spread network in western Europe. The castles around the episcopal or the seignioral palaces offered the market space necessary for trade as well as the protection of the strong walls. Other places, situated either at a crossroads or an important stop along a pilgrims' route, had the advantage of a big clientele. In both cases, around these strategically important trade points began to appear islands of homes of tradesmen, craftsmen, innkeepers, and many others who made their living by trading or servicing the tradesmen and their clients.

At the beginning of the 12th century the old towns began to expand. New people, who had either escaped from the land or had come from "nowhere," began to settle in front of the town walls, and the name of these neighbourhoods came from there: suburb. Gradually these people began to be called "burghers" (citizens). They brought with them the new economic spirit of profit and the exchange of money. To them was due the rapid growth of the towns and an increased desire for freedom characteristic of those who made their living with trade transactions, directed by themselves.

Gradually town space began to get organised. It was surrounded by an additional thick wall and every evening the folding bridges were lifted to protect them from the attacks by bands of tramps or soldiers. Amidst this disorder of narrow and dark streets and too high houses, of which only the ground floor was made of stone, more and more impressive buildings began to appear: a palace, a Gothic cathedral, a watch-tower, houses for noblemen or rich citizens.

The two powers over man met in the middle of the town. On the two sides of the square were erected the cathedral and the town tower. Between them was the market, from which the town itself began. From centre to pe-

riphery of the town were arranged the professional corporations, each one under the patronage of its patron saint. In this way were formed the streets of the goldsmiths, the butchers, the carpenters, the weavers, or the usurers — Lombards and Jews.

The towns had their own problems, unknown to the countrymen/village people. The concentration of many people, their greater mobility, and the almost complete lack of town hygiene made it a favourable place for epidemics, during some of which 1/3 of the population could die. Besides disease, town populations suffered often from hunger. Every weak harvest turned into a catastrophe for the town market. Speculators raised the prices of grain at random and then the town became an arena of rebellions of the poor. All this explained the extremely short life expectancy.

To solve problems of the town, an administrative body was created. It usually consisted of a town council and a court of law. Apart from their numerous rights the town advisors shared with the Church the care for basic education: reading, writing, and arithmetic. On their initiative were taken measures to improve cleanliness and public utilities.

The versatile activities of the administration were financially ensured by funds raised by the citizens themselves. In this way were accumulated substantial funds in the hands of the town council, over which the local feudal lord, the bishop, or the king made demands because of their seignior right. Torn away from the land and living by their own labour, it was very difficult for the citizens to accept governance according to the custom of agrarian feudal society. Along with the revival of towns, the conflict between them and their masters came to a head, and it burst in the 12th century.





## “The town’s air was free”

To the authority based on the power of the seignior, the citizens opposed their association, called a “municipality”, tightly united by an oath. In contrast to the knight’s association, united by an oath of allegiance to one person only, the association of the citizens was bound by an oath to protect the common interest. It was no accident that the first corporations were those of the tradesmen, which were very often exposed to thieves, robbers, and feudal lords. In order to overcome the obstacles of bad and dangerous roads, slow transport, and numerous taxes, the tradesmen began to travel in armed groups. Some signed contracts for associating for a given reason; others created lasting unions, called “hansas”. For example, the power of the German Hansa went far beyond trade interests. It controlled the whole public life along the coast of the Baltic Sea during the 14th-15th centuries.

The craftsmen also formed their own unities: guilds or corporations. They started as religious fraternities for mutual aid. Common funds were created, and funds were raised through regular payments for helping ill people and for organising the guild feast on the day of its patron saint. It was marked by a religious procession and a special festive lunch, or “banquet”. The fraternity of the craftsmen was led by the best masters. They took part in writing the statute of the guild, which determined in detail the method of production and the degrees of qualification that future masters had to pass. The conditions in some guild statutes were so severe that the apprentice who had started work at the age of seven could get his title at a mature age—or not even then. The aim of this strict selection was to protect common interests from disloyal competition and the speculations

of the tradesmen; and to guarantee the quality of production and through this, the name of the whole guild. The ceremony for receiving the master’s certificate competed in solemnity to knighting.

The spirit of order and discipline was transferred onto the government of the towns. This was the only thing that could control a society of people differing in professional, ethnical, property, and social aspects.

The town council and the court arranged the relationships between these diverse groups of people. They grew up from the initiative of citizens who wanted to make their towns a safe place for living and working. The rapid economic development of the towns was proof of their success. Together with it, however, appeared the desire to throw away the most oppressive forms of seignioral dependence.

The ways to struggle for this cause differed. Very often the town bought the wanted freedom and received a special chart. It was relatively more difficult when it was a question of full independence. At some places long and cruel wars erupted that sometimes lasted for years. In the middle of the 12th century towns differed considerably from our current understanding of them. That was the golden time of Venice, for example. Unity with the Pope and vigorous trade created its power, and in the 13th-14th centuries it possessed a major part of the islands on the way from Italy to the Near East.

The results of the town movement were not the same in all regions. In the kingdom the town government worked under the control of a special clerk, whereas independent towns even had the right to declare war and sign peace. The most important achievement of the town movement, however, was the liberation of citizens from personal dependency on the seignior. This was expressed in the widespread saying of the 13th century: “The town air makes the man free.” A



common rule was established, according to which a dependent peasant could be free if he managed to live in the town for a year and one day.

## **D** The town, the cathedral, the university

The cathedral was a town church, where the bishop's chair was placed. Its mission was to "incorporate" the people to religion and that was why its doors were widely open for the town society/public with all its problems. Apart from the church services, in the cathedral were held meetings of the town council or the craftsmen workshops. The very outlook of the cathedrals, their decoration and the functions that they started to perform, clearly showed the changed thinking of the new medieval people: the citizens.

In the 12th century, along with the increase in riches, the Christian perception that rich men had less chance to go to heaven also spread in the towns. This feeling made the wealthy citizens dip into their pockets, so generous donations began to flow to the Church. With the collected money new cathedrals were built, much bigger and more beautiful. The technical innovations of the Gothic style allowed the height of the building to increase up to 48 metres—the height of a contemporary 17-story building. Once in such a temple, the believer got a very real perception for his rise closer to God. The whole meaning of Gothicism was revealed in the words that theologians of the 12th-13th centuries used to repeat, "God is light!," but Gothic splendour would have been impossible without the substantial donations raised in the towns.

The second big achievement arising from the combination of town spirit and Church energy was the medieval university. It was developed on the basis of the schools which existed in all cathedrals. The mission of the school,

to disseminate the words of God, was directed to each Christian after the Cluny reform. There were greater demands for teachers and books. The writing and publishing of books was no longer a priority of the monasteries, and the town library became the new centre of educational activity.

In the 12th century the Parisian schools were united in the name of universal knowledge and this gave us the name of this unity, university. A century later it was a common and known phenomenon in most Western kingdoms. The organisation of education was public and urban. The university originated as a free association for students and teachers, managed by a rector chosen by all of them. The university had exclusive rights and freedom given to it by the Papacy or by the kings.

Both its spirit and system of education were ecclesiastical. The seven free unrestricted arts were taught there, just like the Carolingians. They were the seven different ways of knowledge, leading to the queen of sciences: theology. That was why there was a hierarchy among the four departments of the university. Students began their education in the free or "artistic" department and could not move into the law faculty or medicine faculty without defending a Bachelor's Degree in the free one. Getting a degree in Theology took the most time and required knowledge in the fields of the free arts, law, and medicine. It was no wonder then that the foundations of medieval science were laid in theology.

The university was guided by a book of regulations reminiscent of monastery statutes. The students were clergymen; they were dressed in cassocks, and lived and ate together. Their lives alternated studying, reflection, and practicing liturgy, in harmony with the image that studying was just another way to serve God.



## CHECK-UP

1. *What were the reasons for the revival of European trade in the 12th-13th centuries? Point out the main trading centres in Western Europe: spheres of influence; main goods and markets.*
2. *How was town space organised? Describe a medieval town.*
3. *What means did the towns use in the struggle for freedom and what were the results from it?*
4. *How did the cathedral and the university reflect the town spirit?*

## FACES OF HISTORY:

### The Mendicant Friars

In the medieval town of the West during the 13th century, personal activity, the flourishing of trade and craftsmanship made citizens' lives more satisfied and comfortable. They, however, were Christians and their new wealth made them feel afraid that they had deviated from Christian piety. As if to confirm these moods in the 13th century, heresies spread widely as never before in the towns. More often, a rich tradesman left his work, sold out everything, and gave all the money to the poor. The image of this new "hermit in the town" became a favourite subject in literature and art. It reflected the worries of town society, which during a time of economic development sought spiritual shelter in a new type of religion.

In the 12th century the acts of such people became a target for serious critics on behalf of clergymen. However, in the beginning of the 13th century the Catholic Church's attitude towards them changed; it turned their popularity into a weapon in the struggle against heresy and also a model for a simpler and accessible Christian education, which western society badly needed. This change was connected with the appearance of the "begging" or mendicant monastic orders; they were called so because they supported themselves not with economic activity, like

other orders, but with what the believers gave them during their sermons.

In 1206 Francis, the son of a rich tradesman from the Italian town Assisi, turned his back on the family wealth and went barefoot to preach in Italy. His sermons had a huge success in towns and very often 12 "smaller brothers" (in Latin "minorites") gathered around him. The fame of these saint beggars reached Rome and the Holy See, where presided a very shrewd man, Innocent III (1198-1216). Behind the suspicious outlook of the barefoot and ragged preachers who spoke in the vernacular, and claimed that their dream was to live in utmost poverty, he perceived the exceptional piety of their pursuits. Their example sometimes achieved more than the sermons of the Catholic bishops.

With the Pope's blessing the followers of St. Francis (1182-1226) became a religious order of the monks, "minorites." It joined clergymen and laity, who wanted to live in poverty like Francis himself. Very often their number and popularity increased so much that the Franciscans began to play an important role in the Church affairs of all western Europe. Their influence could be compared only to that of the Dominicans, the order of the friars preachers.



The ideas of Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) had the same origin as St Francis, but took a slightly different direction, because St Dominic went out to preach in the streets from a cathedral school in Spain. He and his followers were very educated, and knew how to arouse the interest of the varied audience of town streets. Their speeches were

decorated with many anecdotes, both instructive and amusing, and represented a real performance for the Christians, who very often preferred to listen to them than attend the parish churches. After their recognition as a religious order, much of the burden of the struggle against the heresy fell onto the Dominicans.

## CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

# 33

### “GOD SAVE THE KING”: WESTERN EUROPE DURING THE XIII-XIVTH CENTURIES

#### **A** The majesty of the Papacy

In the 13th century the bishop of Rome had spread his power over almost all Christian territories in Europe. At the time of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) most European kings were vassals of Rome. The Pope was the indisputable leader of the impressive political entity which the Roman church had become. The instruments of papal power were many and varied: a strong spiritual culture and Christian law valid for all combined with a tax system and network of municipalities covering the Catholic world. The enormous income from the church tithe, which each individual Catholic allocated every year from his funds/resources, allowed the Papacy in

the early 13th century to finance an impressive programme in public health service and education. Two extremely important monastic orders, the Franciscan and the Dominican, provided the model for Christian piety that was broadly implemented.

With their help, the idea that salvation was open only for those Christians recognising the pope's supremacy was popularized. This idea went hand in hand with the suspicious belief that schismatics, heretics, and pagans were equally sinful and should be punished. The results from such a belief were striking: the conquering of Constantinople (1204), the blood of Orthodox Christians, the Holy Inquisition, and the stake for the heretics. The traditional respect for papal authority was mixed with a great deal of fear, and in the East, open hostility.



However, the enormous effort put into the religious life was certainly not prompted primarily by the fears of believers. The age of the pope's glory gave also birth to some beautiful fruit which formed an inseparable part of European civilisation.

The Church provided an answer to the worries of the intellectual elite. During the 1260s and 1270s these worries developed from the numerous, previously unknown writings of Aristotle, which Western Europe received in translation from Arabian. The Aristotelian explanation of the world, opposite the Christian one, shook the conscience of the intellectuals, who did not reject its brilliant logic. Thomas Aquinas, the man who successfully united these philosophical systems, was a Dominican and an expert of Aristotle. He used Aristotelean logic to systematize the difficult and immense subject matter of theology and showed into how the disturbing diversity of the world could be organised. At the top of his orderly system was the Church, because the mind was a great gift by God, given to the people to believe even more strongly, after they understood the world.

The theory of Thomas Aquinas was a brilliant one, but it was only a theory. In practice the Papacy had to demonstrate substantial flexibility in order to cope with real problems. Two whole centuries (11th – 13th) were necessary for Rome to neutralize its strongest rival: the Holy Roman Empire. The last distinguished emperor, Friedrich II (1194-1250), died excluded from the Church and the Empire sunk in the darkness of the Great Interregnum (1250-1273). A successor of Saint Peter and Constantine the Great, the pope pretended to be the "supreme judge of all earthly rulers". But the kings, his faithful allies in the struggle against the empire who had received generous privileges from him, had their own am-

bitions for power: power within the kingdom's boundaries but supreme, without any authorities above it.



## From the right to power to the power of law

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A hundred years after the time when Innocent III dictated European policy from Constantinople to the English Channel, his followers were forced to move their residency to Avignon and recognise their dependence on the French king. The long, humiliating "Avignon exile" began (1309-1377). The person who thus proved that the pope's supremacy had passed was Phillippe IV "the Fair," a powerful king. Eight generations of Capetians had worked hard for three centuries to achieve this power.

When they ascended the throne in the end of the 10th century, the Capetians had some insignificant properties in the heart of France (Ile-de-France) and the crown of the Western Frankish kingdom, received by the good will of a council of mighty noblemen. The first concern of Hugh Capet and his successors was to prevent these same noblemen from taking away the crown from them. In this way the Capetians gained their first victory, as the king's power became hereditary rather than elected.

Together with the crown Philippe II Augustus (1180-1223) inherited a difficult rivalry with another powerful French clan, the Plantagenets. Although they were vassals of the French king, they possessed much more land than him. In 1154 when Henry II Plantagenet ascended the English throne, all England was added to his French possessions. The lengthy rivalry was finally put an end to on the battlefield at Bouvine in 1214. This military success increased the French domain of Philippe II four times.

The management of these vast possessions had been of a constant concern



for the king, as it was evident from the accounts of his contemporaries. During the reign of Philippe II Augustus were introduced some administrative innovations which strengthened the central government's position. The office of the travelling king's inspectors was founded – the bayle – that also exercised legal and administrative control over local feudal lords. A big part of the king's income was spent on building roads, fortifications, and churches. The king's domain, despite its increased expenses, became one of the communications centres in Europe. In its very heart was erected the king's residency, in Paris. At the time of Philippe II it was surrounded by a new wall, the streets were paved, a town market hall was built, and a few markets and a new royal palace, the Louvre, built. All this gave Paris the lustre of a capital, equal to the lustre of the king who lived in it.

The steady policy of centralisation was continued by Louis IX "the Saint" (1226-1270). Like most kings who ruled in peace, he also enjoyed the great respect of his subjects. The only war which he considered necessary and fair was that against the infidels.

Louis IX the Saint was unprecedentedly pious. He fasted constantly, subjected himself to self-castigation, and got up before dawn in order to sing at the morning service with the Franciscan monks. Most probably he would have made a perfect monk, but then the French kingdom would have lost one of its most eminent rulers. Although he loved his role of a warrior of Christ, Louis IX never forgot his mission of a king, working to consolidate the central power. During his reign the king's court of law in the person of the Parisian parliament was turned into a state institution and was established by the king's court as a specialised body of justice.

After the state judiciary Louis IX also founded a state monetary system. The gold coin "louis d'or" struck by him

was the only valid one in the king's domain. This eased enormously trade and credit operations in the whole kingdom.

The complete territorial unity of the French kingdom, in nearly its contemporary boundaries, was finished by Philippe IV the Fair (1285-1314). He attracted to his court a whole pleiad of lawyers, good experts on Roman law. Their activities, inspired by the king, produced the formula, "the king is the emperor in his empire" – the most immediate expression of the Capetians in the beginning of the 14th century.

The growing need of money made Philippe IV put a tax on the clergymen in France. This prompted a dramatic conflict with the papacy, which a century earlier would have been pernicious for the French king. In 1302, however, the subjects stood behind it. "General Estates" from representatives of the three classes were summoned: knights, clergymen and citizens of the whole kingdom. They declared their support to the king. The existence of the "General Estates" was one of the proofs of existing common national interests: the interests of the people living within the same boundaries under the same government. These continued to be summoned for specific reasons during the whole 14th century, always on the king's initiative.

## **C The Western monarchy: two ways leading towards one aim**

At the end of the 12th century the political system of feudalism was already old. The time of the small estates had gone. There came the time for another type of organisation, the territorial state. Shrewd contemporaries were able to understand it demographically. The king of France considered himself the most powerful one because he had the most subjects: fourteen million to hardly four



million for the English king. But there could be a big population only within vast boundaries and the new state demanded unification of large territories.

The authority that could fulfill this unity belonged to the kings. During the whole medieval period they managed to keep their three most important positions. Only the king had the privilege to be anointed, i.e. to be given God's power. Of all noblemen only the king had the right not to kneel with his head bent and his hands joined together in front of anyone but God. The third pillar of the king's majesty was the income from his domain. A full treasury permitted successful wars. It also permitted something that was impossible during the two previous centuries: governing distant regions. This job was given to paid king's clerks, who did not possess land and were aware that they could be changed; this made them even more faithful.

Chance permitted both the English and the French kings to build up strong economic support for their authority. In England as early as 1066 1/7 part of the most fertile lands were announced possessions of William the Conqueror. The French kings were in a less favourable situation with their small inherited lands in Ile-de-France. But their ambitions to raise their income by encouraging trade and production made the Capetians good owners.

In both the English and the French cases the result was the same: uniting vast territories under one power: the king's. For their government, unified principles in law, administration, and the army developed. All this was done gradually, in the course of territorial union and in conformity with circumstances.

In England a unified tax system was introduced by William the Conqueror at the end of the 11th century; he ordered the preparation of a special inventory: "The Domesday Book". Behind this rather gloomy title was hid-

den a precise and detailed inventory of all possessions of the kingdom, according to which taxes were fixed. In France a unified tax system already existed in the king's domain, and it expanded its scope together with the expansion of the boundaries. It became a general one only in the 14th century under Philippe IV, when the union of the kingdom was also completed.

Gradually the king's army was no longer dependent on the will of the local seigneurs. In England this happened at the time of Henry IV Plantagenet (1154-1189), who obliged every free man in the kingdom to participate in military marches, armed according to his means. In France the king gathered mercenary troops. In this way he provided professional soldiers who fought selflessly, because their living depended on that.

Civil servants (sheriffs in England, bayle in France) were obliged to oversee implementation of the king's orders over the kingdom's territories. These were compulsory for everybody and were issued in the mother tongue of the king, not in the universally acknowledged international language: Latin. The people subjected to the king should know that first of all they were his subjects, and only after that, Christians, citizens or peasants.

## **D** Enemies and allies of the king's power

When the kings began their struggle to impose their power, they encountered strong opposition from the feudal lords. For those who possessed significant estates, the king's rising power meant restriction of their seignioral rights. Very often the struggle for dominance led the two parties to the battlefield, but arms were not the only means which the kings used. They also exploited contradictions between the seigneurs and their discontented vassals,



who often became allies of the king in confiscating properties, additional taxes, and other burdens.

There were considerably more common interests in the process of centralisation between the towns and the king. For many reasons, safety on the roads, the free access to the markets in all spheres, and the peace in the kingdom were very important for them. To secure the support of the towns, the kings willingly gave them substantial amounts of money and their military force. If sometimes there were conflicts

between the central power and the towns, it was because complete urban independence deprived the king of the possibility of controlling the tax income and exercising administrative and legal power to the fullest extent. In these cases, urban freedom was restricted. But the towns could not be ignored and their representatives participated together with other classes in the general estates in France or in the parliament in England. The town needed the big markets of the kingdom, and the kingdom, the riches of the towns.

### **CHECK UP**

*1. Point out the means with which the Papacy achieved its power in the 13th century. What was the conflict with the secular authority about?*

*2. How did the Capetians manage to impose their power in the whole of France?*

*3. Compare the two forms of the national state that existed in the 13th century – France and England.*

*4. Which were the most important institutions of the kingdom and in what way was the national interest shown?*

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The dream of the king**

When in 1130 the English king, Henry I, was in Normandy he once had a nightmare. In his dream he saw a crowd of sweating peasants approaching the king's throne, gritting their teeth and threatening him with his tools. Later on this vision was replaced by an even more horrible sight. The faithful knights of Henry had surrounded him and pointed his arms at him. The court chronicler, John of Worcester, who had written this account, complained: "And indeed, this dream scared the king, who was dressed in crimson, and whose words, according to Solomon, should arouse horror, just the same way a lion's roar does."

Apart from Henry's fright, this vision revealed the special place of the king in

medieval society. He stood apart from the three classes of people "who worked, who fought and who prayed" and at the same time he carried the huge burden of his mission: maintaining the balance among them. The success of this mission was guaranteed by his role as God's messenger, who had the power to protect the enlightened in the real world.

The whole ritual of coronation was meant to confirm the status of the king and make it evident for his subjects. The coronation of the French king lasted several days. It started with a procession from Paris to Rheims. In front of the cathedral in Rheims the king was welcomed officially by the bishop and led into the temple. The



ceremony resembled the greatest Christian liturgy during which the king first received gold slippers and gold spurs. After that he made a vow that he would protect the Church and keep the religion. In response to the vow the bishop anointed him with a special oil, which, according to the legend, God had sent by a pigeon to St Remigey to christen Hlodvig. After the annointment the bishop gave the king his sword, the ring with the king's stamp, the sceptre, and finally the crown.

At the coronation the Church played an intermediary role between God and his representative, giving him the attributes of his sanctity. During the middle ages it was so huge and indisputable that people thought that just one touch of the king's body or clothes was enough to cure either an ailment or an illness such as tuberculosis. This sanctity, possessed only by the king, was the source of his power to rule Christians and guarantee that each of the three classes would steadily fulfill the required duties in medieval society.

## CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

# 34

### THE DECLINE OF BYZANTIUM

#### **A** Constantinople after the Latins

In 1261 the Nycean Emperor, Michael VIII Paleologus (1259-1282), conquered Constantinople. He triumphantly entered the capital, walking on foot all the way from the Golden Gate to the monastery of Studia with the icon of the Virgin, heavenly guardian of the Empire, carried before him.

After 60 years of Latin dominance the streets of Constantinople again witnessed the glorious imperial coronation ceremony when Michael VIII was for a second time crowned emperor at Saint Sophia. Dazzled with the pompous celebration of the orthodox emperor's re-

turn, the Byzantines were apt to think that order was restored and the Latin rule was but a bad dream. Only a glimpse, however, sufficed to register the devastation it had left behind. Deserted and decaying buildings, unweeded squares, and the traces of fires told the story of past adversity. To pay his debts to the Venetians, the last Latin emperor had to even take off the lead roof covering of the Great Emperor's palace. This symbol of power was in ruins, abandoned to the natural elements and only casual passers-by would use its walls as a toilet!

From the moment they ascended to the throne of Constantinople, the Paleologs devoted themselves to the reconstruction of capital and empire. They only partially succeed in both. The intensified building of



fortress walls and palaces and the restoration of old buildings on the emperor's order soon died away for lack of money. Taxes were coming to the coffers only from the northwest regions of Asia Minor, Thrace, Macedonia, and parts of continental Greece. Shortage of funds grew into a permanent obstacle for the emperors. To provide the support for a capable fleet they had to grant increasing privileges to the Venetian and Genoese merchants, which further undermined Byzantium's economic stability.

The whole military energy of the Paleologs was devoted to driving the Latins out of Central Greece and Peloponnesus. Exhausting military campaigns were carried out and the Empire was paying too heavily for them. The grand-scale plans of Michael VIII Paleologus had to be fulfilled with the resources of Byzantium which, at the end of the 13th century, was only a local power hardly capable of even restoring its domination over the whole of continental Greece. In 1274 the need for allies at any cost forced the Emperor to sign a union with the Pope at Lyons. Instead of benefitting Byzantium, this act only harmed it. Several centuries after the iconoclastic crisis, the capital witnessed again noisy processions of monks with icons and candles, severely threatening the Emperor with God's punishment for making concessions to the Roman apostates. The alienation of rulers and subjects was painfully revealed: blood was spilled in the attempt to suppress the riots caused by the population's loyalty to Orthodoxy, which to the Byzantine had always meant loyalty to the Empire, too.

Michael VIII's heirs broke with the union policy but could not overcome the growing crisis, which in the beginning of the 14th century brought about civil wars. The war of 1341-1347, when the rights of the lawful regent, John Cantacuzene, were disputed by the empress-mother, was particularly bloody. Everything seemed permissible in the struggle for the

throne: ruthlessness, murder, plotting. For the sake of success neither of the warring parties hesitated to gain as allies the Empire's traditional enemies: Bulgarians, Serbs, Turks, etc.

Everything the first Paleologs had so laboriously achieved was easily wasted. When John Cantacuzene ascended to the throne (1347-1354), the Empire badly needed stability. A new power was threatening it from the East: the Ottoman Turks. In 1352 they already had set foot on the Balkans.

## **B** The age of intellectuals

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Anyone trying to describe life in Constantinople in the 13th-15th centuries would be impressed by a peculiar contrast. Even as public buildings were in a state of grievous decay, the capital was growing full of handsome, medium-sized but very comfortable private residences. Low yet quite spacious, they were situated in well-trimmed parks, and high fences isolated them from the world and the noise of street crowds. Each of these mansions was in itself an architectural masterpiece, different from all others just as its owner differed from his neighbour. As a rule he was a well-to-do person, and his good education was a requirement. It was these people who in the 13th-15th centuries discovered the pleasure of learning. While the world outside their own houses was full of wars, street riots, and destruction, nothing compared to the pleasure of talking to a learned companion or the joy of revealing before one's pupil the wonderful and infinite world of knowledge. And Byzantine intellectuals would readily enjoy this pleasure in soul and body. Sophisticated intellectual exercise was as vital to them as the care for one's health. Their average life expectancy was 65-70 years against 40 for the rest of the population.



Such homes had all conveniences: beds, curtains, carpets, as well as antique or exotic objects from distant lands. Meals were entire rituals of pleasure. Lunch started at noon and lasted till late in the day. Courses included fruits, fish, and dainty meats (crane, peacock, deer), which were rounded off with wine and cheese. These culinary feasts aimed not the satisfaction of hunger but the discovery of a new harmony of aromas. The Byzantine table was full of spices: horseradish, celery, parsley, cumin, garlic. Everything, even wines, were spiced with cinnamon, rose-petals or wormwood.

Given the inimitable aura of the Empire's decline, the intellectual usually led a dual life. The most glaring example was Theodor Metochite (1270-1332), who lived through a series of unexpected ups and downs. Exiled in early youth, in the course of 30 years he was prime minister of the Empire, yet he died again in disfavour, thus leaving contradictory record of himself. His flatterers pictured him as a just and generous statesman and a man of great wisdom. His enemies argued that he was a proud twaddler and a bore, unforgivably corrupted by egotism and greed.

The qualities that made Metochite an example of the typical Byzantine intellectual provoked both flattery and abuse from his contemporaries. He brought about change not only through his thinking and writing, but above all through living before everybody's eyes the life of a scholar. Moreover, Metochite would not have been a true Byzantine had his scholarly pride and characteristically intellectual contempt of the world at all hampered him from showing the sincerest faith. There was not the slightest shadow of pretence in his piety, which materialized itself through the enormous sums he invested into the reconstruction of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople. He gathered there the

richest book collection of the time, which functioned as the capital's public library.

The entire Monastery complex bears the imprint of this man's exquisite taste. The inimitable nuances of subdued colour, the superb technique of the mosaics, the connoisseur's subtle sense of perfection were all gathered by Metochite, only to be dedicated to God. He was a Byzantine in faith with a Moslem turban on his head, in the Constantinoplean fashion of the day. He was a man of faith and intellect, of freedom and obedience to the emperor, seeking both other worldly salvation and the pleasures of this world. Only the Byzantines during the Empire's decline could accommodate such contradictory and diverse inclinations.



## Byzantine Learning

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The secret of Byzantine civilization, which transformed the Empire into the medieval world's indisputable cultural centre, is found in its role as natural heir to both ancient and early Christian traditions. The Byzantines, however, exposed to the most serious judgment all books and ideas that came across their cultural horizon. What exactly was needed? To what uses? This was the confident eye of the host who knew what he wanted and had no wish to welcome cultural values irrelevant to his own cultural goals. The Byzantine taste never lost its exceptional sense of moderation. Thus interest in the pagan philosophers was encouraged as long as extremes were avoided.

The system of Byzantine higher education incorporated all the knowledge of the day. To be well educated, the young person had to study logic, metaphysics\*, arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy, ethics, politics, law,



rhetoric, and theology. This happened at a school, private or monastic, which bore the personal imprint of its lector.

Byzantium always had an abundance of good teachers whose work demanded vast erudition but no particular originality. What most mattered for the pedagogue was the ability to tackle any topic and be able to give a clear answer to pupils' questions. And questions were innumerable since the handbooks in all subjects were versions of the texts of ancient authors and church fathers. Thus the Byzantine studied Homer and the Bible even while learning his grammar rules. This system of education fashioned the Byzantines as people who could discuss both theological problems and the most famous authorities of classical Greek antiquity with amazing freedom.

But in the last period of Byzantium's cultural flourishing, during the 13th-15th centuries, Christian education grew increasingly weak. While church doctrine was authorized by the state such that everyone should unquestioningly obey, the Greek mind began to seek a new freedom in the world of the pre-Christian philosophers known from school. All that had previously been only a school subject and intellectual game was now acquiring an independent status. Faith was still faith, holy and indisputable, but the intellectual interest in it gradually faded away. Obviously, Christianity no longer satisfied all the needs of the intellectual.

## **D** Hesychasm: the personal way to God

The crisis of the Empire relentlessly highlighted the most important Christian issue, the true road to Salvation. The answer came from Mount Athos.

As early as the 4th century individual hermits had settled there. Six centuries later a society of hermits was formed around the Monastery established by the

Reverend Athanasius of Athos. In the 12th century under the Comneni the centre of Byzantine monkship acquired its status of a republic of monks. Better known as "Holy Mount", Athos played a crucial role in the period of Byzantium's cultural flourishing (13th-15th century) as a centre of intense theological inquiry.

The enormous energy that spurred on Byzantine scholars in cities, inspired the monks of Athos to probe into issues of the creed. In the middle of the 14th century their ascetic practice provoked serious debate involving the finest argumentative tools of theology, physics, astronomy and philosophy. This debate shaped the brilliant doctrine of Hesychasm which Orthodoxy largely owes to Gregory Palamas (1295-1359). One of Metochite's most promising scholars, at the age of 20 Gregory abandoned the opportunity of a great career of state and retired to Mount Athos. On his return to the lay world he became an ardent and eloquent defender of Hesychasm. For years he used his impressive knowledge in the service of public debate, until in the middle of the 14th century, at two successive Constantinople councils, the Church stated that Hesychasm was "a true expression of Orthodoxy."

Many Hesychast ideas had formerly been current in Christianity. For centuries a strong mystic undercurrent had been reminded all that man's communion with God required the extreme exertion of one's powers, a break with this world's temptations and purging of all sinful thoughts. Simple and readily accessible, these prescriptions still required an enormous effort which only monks were capable of. In this respect Hesychasts seemed to reach the limit of human potential. They wholly accepted obedience to a spiritual father (elder) who guided them in all their deeds. For hours on end would they be steeped in silence (hesychia) or passionate prayer, upright bodies tense, lifted elbows closely pressed in, expressing even through pos-



ture man's aspiration to the Godhead. Described by Hesychasts with the single word "praxis," this discipline led to the incomparable reward of 'revelation' (Gr. theoria'), man's chance to perceive heavenly light.

What made Hesychasm important not only to monks was the idea that God, inaccessible as He was, could be revealed to man in His infinite love for him. No human effort could ever make God do this. But if He chose to present such indisputable proof of his existence, the only space where heavenly light could be revealed was man. The few elect, honoured with

an earthly assurance of Salvation, saw heavenly light streaming from their bodies, from their hearts.

The establishment of the Hesychast ideal, assuming that man's salvation depended entirely on his personal choice in cooperation with God's will, consolidated the faith. Assured that he carried God within, man was freed from worldly adversity. If heavenly light could be revealed in man only, peace and war, wealth and poverty were powerless to darken it. Such a person had the potential to create his world anew, if the forces of evil should destroy it. Salvation was his.

### **CHECK-UP**

1. Explain the basic purposes of the first Paleologs' rule.
2. Describe the life of the intellectual in 14th-century Byzantium.
3. Why was Hesychasm accepted as the official doctrine of the Orthodox church and what were its consequences?

## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Traps of Learning**

When in the 13th-15th centuries intellectual interest in religion ebbed away, the Byzantine mind increasingly looked for nourishment in the familiar philosophy of pre-Christian times. Thus, without ceasing to be an ardent Christian, the Byzantine intellectual lost his spiritual integrity and part of him, the creative part, was attracted to the non-Christian world. Under these conditions the balance between faith and erudition was occasionally tipped. This marked the end of the Byzantine spirit.

A typical case in point was Georgius Gemystes Plethon (1360-1452). Born in Constantinople, he spent the greater part of his life in Morea, a district of Peloponnesus, as advisor to the local despot. A highly educated lawyer, Plethon used all his intellectual powers to construct his brilliant

theory of the ideal state. Organized in the manner of ancient Sparta, it was to be ruled by philosophers, its laws being discipline and order. Even people's faith in this state was linked to their faith in the ancient gods of Greece.

Every line of Plethon's writing is permeated by admiration for the ancient Hellenic world, as well as discontent with the Empire's decay. The tragedy of his own people and the recent Byzantine victories over the Latins in Morea inspired Plethon to persuade the despot into reforming his government after the new model. Thus the pathos of Greek patriotism emerged, a patriotism that was ready to bury even Orthodoxy itself. Plethon's contemporary, Patriarch Gennadius Scholarius, painfully wrote, "Gemystes was so possessed by



Hellenic ideas that he cared little for the dissemination of the holy fathers' Christian legacy. ... he read and studied the old Greek books, first the poets, then the philosophers too, not to learn the language, as all good Christians do, but to mimic their opinions. ... The climax of this apostasy he reached under the influence of a Jew..."

According to this learned man the only thing that could replace the gloomy present was the glorious past of Plato's Greece. Such a project for the empire's salvation was possible only in Plethon's imagination, only as an utopia\*. To be saved, he believed, the Empire had to give up its universal character and link

its name with one people only, i.e., it had to give up being an Empire.

Ironically, it was precisely in the ancient lands of Greek civilization that the ideas of Plethon bore no fruit. However, they had an enormous success in Italy, where Plethon was frequently invited to give lectures. His interpretation of a host of philosophers totally unfamiliar to the Western mind awakened an enormous interest in the glorious world of antiquity. Through Plethon's ideas and the Medici money, in the mid-15th century the West got its renowned Florentine Platonic Academy, a centre of the ideas that charged the Italian Renaissance with exceptional energy.

## CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

# 35

### BULGARIAN CULTURE IN THE 13TH-14TH CENTURY

#### **A** The world of contacts: Athos, Orthodoxy's small universe

In the 14th century the Orthodox world lived through unnerving military and political shakeups. Man, especially on the Balkans, felt no longer protected by his sovereign who was totally given to wars with his neighbours to possess one patch of land or another. More and more frequently he asked himself what were the reasons for the lost unity and the impending non-Christian threat on both East and

West. Thus eyes were more and more frequently turned to Mount Athos, the only place on the Balkans free of dissent.

A small patch of land, the peninsula of Mount Athos with its 500 square kilometres was probably the most densely populated place on the Balkans, second only to Constantinople. In its 300 monasteries monks from all over the Orthodox world were gathered. For Orthodox rulers it was an issue of honour to construct their own monastery on Mount Athos. Along with the Byzantine there were Bulgarian, Russian, Georgian, Serbian monasteries, all generously donated



by rulers and frequented by Orthodox pilgrims from everywhere. One of the first monasteries built there, "St Georgi Zograf" was Bulgarian, but Bulgarians lived in other monasteries as well, especially in the great Lavra, the centre of Byzantine learning.

Built for seclusion, Athos became the centre of most active and fruitful contacts, based on the favourable creed of Hesychasm. The Athos monks devoted their life to the long and hard road to salvation, where man aspiring to God collaborated with God descending to man to reveal His light. Given such a grand purpose, all differences between monks became insignificant. Before being Byzantine, Georgian, Russian, Serbian, or Bulgarian, they were human beings believing in God's presence within man. This belief endowed them with an enormous energy channelled on Athos into the reading of theological books. All of them, therefore, were perfectly fluent in Greek and one of their major occupations was faithfully translating texts into their native tongues. Bulgarians were very successful in this. Their translations of liturgical and didactic texts enjoyed general recognition and they were copied for Serbian, Russian, Wallachian and even Jerusalem Christians.

In the 14th century when Hesychasm was being imposed as the official doctrine of the Eastern Church, Bulgarians were among the most ardent supporters of Gregory Palama, as many important Bulgarian clerics had been schooled at Mount Athos. Among them was Theodosius of Turnovo (1260-1346). In the Hesychast monastery of Paroria (now Strandja) he studied the secrets of Byzantine divinity in the company of people like the future universal patriarch, Calystes. On his return to Bulgaria in 1351 Theodosius founded the Kilifarevo Monastery near Turnovo and became a tutor in his turn.

Many Bulgarians, Serbs, Wallachians, Hungarians and Greeks learned from his Hesychast sermons that concentration and introspection aimed for man's spiritual reformation rather than negation of the rest of the world. This idea informed the monastery's busy activity in the fields of education and literature: activity that won the highest acknowledgement. In 1362 Theodosius of Turnovo was invited to the Byzantine capital. After his death in 1363 he was canonized, the ecumenical patriarch himself writing his life. The Byzantine pantheon opened its gates to the honourable Bulgarian, a measure of disappearing boundaries in the Orthodox world.

## **B** Patriarch Euthymius

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When he made for Constantinople in 1362, Theodosius of Turnovo took with him Euthymius, his most promising pupil. Of noble origins, Euthymius chose a spiritual career and found himself in Kilifarevo, where he went through the first order of Hesychast service and took part in making of new translations. In Constantinople Euthymius spent three years in its most famous cloister, the Studia Monastery, renowned for its rich library. Spurred on by a passion for learning, in 1365 Euthymius visited the heart of orthodoxy, Mount Athos. At Athos he continued his Kilifarevo studies, having all the enormous material collected at monastic libraries at his disposal.

Exploring the various Russian and Serbian versions of basic liturgical texts once borrowed from Bulgaria, Euthymius discovered a lot of changes. The original Old Bulgarian had got mixed up with dialect words and phrases which lessened accuracy to the Greek source. These alterations seemed to reflect the division among Slavic Orthodoxy. The language of the unified Slavic Orthodox Church was also undermined. Yet it was sacred and division



within it was a mark of heresy and decay which could, more easily than any war, do away with Slavdom itself.

Euthymius devoted all his energy to reunifying the all-Slav Church language, Old Bulgarian, accepted in the Slavic world together with Orthodoxy itself. There was a lot to do. There were not only the first translators' errors and ambiguities to correct, but also the way of writing the letters needed standardization. This required the erudition of the intellectuals of Euthymius's generation, who were equally fluent in Greek and Bulgarian and knew in detail Church literature in its various translated versions.

Charged with such ideas, Euthymius returned to Bulgaria in 1371 and founded a new 'Trinity' monastery near Turnovo, where he worked in company with Bulgarian and Slavic monks. And when in 1375 Euthymius was ordained all-Bulgarian Patriarch, he had the excellent opportunity to enact his intentions as the policy of the Turnovo Patriarchate. His work was so important that no political borders could be an impediment to the Bulgarian Patriarch.

After the division of the Bulgarian kingdom from the middle of the 13th century to the 1370s, the Bulgarians in Thrace, Macedonia, and the Morava Valley lived under the rule of foreign rulers. Only in Misia in the middle of the 14th century were there three autonomous Bulgarian state centres, in constant fight among themselves: the Vidin kingdom, the Turnovo kingdom and the principality of Dobrudja. In this unfavourable political situation Patriarch Euthymius succeeded in imposing his ideas thanks to his enormous authority and personal ability. The Patriarch's pupils were Bulgarians from all sides of the Balkans coming to Turnovo. They were Hesychast monks who were not only fully aware of the Patriarch's intentions, but also energetically turned them into reality. These were some of society's most active people: they were constantly

travelling, preaching, and guiding, yet also translating and copying out multiple manuscripts of the most frequently used-liturgical books and many previously unknown texts of orthodox literature. Due to their activities, Euthymius's changes in liturgical language were imposed on all Bulgarian churches outside the Turnovo kingdom, as well as within it.

What is more, the new version was accepted far beyond the lands populated with Bulgarians, thanks to the Bulgarian Patriarch's followers and pupils who were among Orthodoxy's ecclesiastical elite. One of them was Cyprian, Euthymius's schoolfriend from Kilifarevo, who later became head of the Russian Church. Another was Nicodemus, who introduced the Turnovo writing reform in Wallachia. Old Bulgarian was the official language there as late as the 17th century. Other pupils of Euthymius were Gregory Tsamblak who successively occupied high ecclesiastical posts in Serbia, Moldova, and Russia, and Constantine of Kostenets, who was active in Serbia. Due to the efforts of these exceptional men Orthodox Christians from the Balkans to the Ural celebrated their faith in Bulgarian.

## **C** Bulgaria's Authority

In the middle of the 14th century Serbia became the primary political power on the Balkans. Its expansion reached in Stefan Dushan's time (1331-1355) depended very much on the annexation of Epirus, Thessaly, and the whole of Macedonia. Serbia's rise coincided with the deep political crisis in the two formerly powerful states on the Balkans, Bulgaria and Byzantium. When the Orthodox world had to acknowledge the new place of Dushan's powerful state, it needed the support of Bulgaria's indisputable church authority. In 1345 the Serbian Archbishop, Ioanichius, was ordained patriarch by the



Bulgarian Patriarch, Simeon. A year later he crowned Stefan Dushan and only then was the man who had conquered half the Balkan peninsula granted the title of "tsar". Extending the patriarchate from the Bulgarians was more than skillful exploitation of the political situation. This gesture expressed the others' opinion of Bulgaria as paragon of the Orthodox kingdom in the entire Slavonic world. Stefan Dushan could achieve anything with his sword: wealth, fame, and his enemies' respect. But power was nothing if it did not come from God. Only such power could both raise the ruler above his subjects and impose on him the only possible royal conduct, Christian devotion. Such was the power of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371), Dushan's contemporary. A friend to the Hesychasts, he generously donated to their monasteries.

Under his patronage the monasteries around Turnovo multiplied so much that they were called "Holy Mount like Mount Athos". Unwaveringly concerned with the faith's purity, in 1359 the Tsar convened a council against heretics while the Turnovo Patriarchate declared itself against union with Rome, even as Constantinople hesitated a stellar example of the Bulgarian kingdom being "the staple of Orthodoxy". It was natural that such a tsar's power should, as his royal title suggested, extend over "all Bulgaians and Greeks". It was natural that he should issue his decrees in both Bulgarian and Greek, the official languages of Orthodoxy. Even when he lost his battles,

Ivan Alexander's patronage of church culture disregarded the narrowing borders of his kingdom. And the powerful Stefan Dushan and all other Slavic rulers could not but follow the example of Bulgarian kings in their affairs of state. They all adopted the Bulgarian principle of government and its basic law, the Nomocanon, uniting ecclesiastical and state laws into a uniform whole. If you could govern your country and your Church by the same principles you were giving your subjects an order sanctified by the Lord and your authority in the Orthodox world would not be questioned.

That is why, when in 1345 Constantine Manassius' s Chronicle of the World (12th century) was translated on Ivan Alexander's order, the translation included episodes from Bulgarian history as well as many illuminations and the portrait of the ruler and his family among them. Preserved to the present, this translation allotted Bulgarians the place they actually occupied according to their own notions: a centrally important role in world history.

During the 13th-14th centuries certain new motifs, generically known as "bulgarski rospev", entered the liturgical chant. They can be heard even today in the churches of Moldova, the Ukraine, and Russia. Bulgarian authority was so great that even the name of Ioan Kukuzel 'the Angelically Voiced', the reformer of Byzantine church music, was related to it. And "the second John Damascene of Orthodox music" was believed to be of Bulgarian origin.

## CHECK-UP

1. How did Mount Athos become Orthodoxy's spiritual centre?
2. Explain the reform in ecclesiastical language undertaken by Patriarch Euthymius, and its intention.
3. Why did the 14th-century Bulgarian kingdom become "the staple of Orthodoxy"?
4. Describe the various manifestations of the Bulgarian state's authority.



## **FACES OF HISTORY:**

### **The Boyana Murals**

In the outskirts of Vitosha Mountain there is a small church that has been preserved for some seven centuries now. It was decorated in 1259 on the order of Sebastocrator Kaloyan. Nephew to the tsar and ruler of the Sredets District, he was a well-to-do man though he left behind an orthodox temple rather than a fancy palace.

The artist of Boyana preferred the fresco technique probably because it offered an unlimited freedom in the handling of colour. The outlines of the image were drawn upon the wet plaster. Only then were colours laid as rich and well matched as the painter's imagination would have them. The Boyana master used soft pastel hues to create the colourful multifigural compositions which even now amaze us with rich nuance and hue.

A portrait of the donors, Sebastocrator Kaloyan and his spouse, Desislava, decorates the church porch. Upright full-size elongated figures in solemn postures, they seem to be attending a mass. Their decorations and dress, even the pattern of its material, is presented to the last detail. It is their faces, however, that capture one's interest. Unlike the highly stylized facial feature of icons, these display a lot of detail. Lit up by graceful

smiles, these are also profoundly introspective, typical of those aspiring after salvation. There is triumph as well as humility, and a sense of duty fulfilled, about them. Endowed with power and wealth, Sebastocrator Kaloyan in turn richly donated to the Church, his concern for administration, tax collection, or legislature revealing itself as concern for the personal salvation of both his Christian subjects and himself.

Images like those in Boyana can also be found in the church porches of Constantinople. The postures are the same, as are the clothes and the gestures. So is the idea that the piety of rulers and their humility before the highest power of heaven must be shown. At the time when the Boyana frescoes were painted, Byzantium no longer existed, but the art of its capital remained the invariable model of Orthodox visual art. The Boyana murals unquestionably testify to the extent to which Bulgarian culture was an integral part of the millenium-old tradition of Orthodox art. It was a fully-fledged and complete part which could freely incorporate relevant elements in sacred art without obstructing or distorting its message.



## EVERYDAY LIFE IN MEDIEVAL BULGARIA

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### **A** Bulgarians and the Church

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According to the canons of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, a newborn baby had to be baptized within 8 days of its birth. Thus the life of the medieval Bulgarian started with a church rite: the priest dipped the child into a font\* of holy water and gave it a Christian name. No matter how rich or poor the parents were, the infant received the name of some saint, most frequently Georgi, Petur, Pavel, Dimiter, Ivan, Nikola, or Maria, Elena, Anna, etc.

Marriage, the next important moment in one's life, was also specially treated by the Church, as it sacramentally united two persons for life. A second marriage was permissible only in case of death, and a third was a rare exception. These general principles of Orthodox church life in medieval Bulgaria were deeply approved by a patriarchal society, highly sensitive to the purity of morals. That is why adulterers had to be punished before everyone's eyes: they were driven naked before the whole population or in winter they were thrown into the river. The Church strictly observed the preservation of family values, as in times of uncertainty the family gave one a sense of support and protection.

Death, the final event in the medieval Bulgarian's life, could not do without the church's blessing, either. One's eternal abode had to be in the consecrated ground

of the churchyard, usually in the vicinity of the church itself. The medieval Bulgarian treated his earthly existence as a brief episode, a preparatory road leading to eternity. According to Christian doctrine, after his death man did not go back to "the eternal night of non-being", but rather passed into a different form of life. Everything transitory within man died out and was shed, just as the trees shed their blossoms in spring to make room for ripening fruit. And the fruit of one's life was according to the deeds of piety: the righteous went to heaven, the sinners to hell.

To be more confident in his earthly pilgrimage, full of so many temptations, the Bulgarian stuck to the Church, his guide. Both his earthly and his eternal abode were built in its vicinity. As established by the Church, the notion of death cultivated an active attitude to life. If all earthly doings were observed and judged by God, man should act with enormous care. It was particularly important if his personal welfare was used to the benefit of others. "Love thy neighbour" was a maxim of the faith shaping the conduct of the medieval Bulgarian.

### **B** Church and society

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The Christian principle of care for the other unified Bulgarian society. Differences in property were never perceived dramatically, for under the



Church's influence a special attitude to wealth formed. While the accumulation of wealth for its own sake was severely condemned, wealth spent to benefit the needy was promoted. Funds collected through donations gave the Bulgarian Church the opportunity to actively practice charity, especially with regard to the promotion of education.

Bulgarian primary schools were affiliated with the parish church. Tutored by the priest himself, seven-year olds learned the basic skills of reading and writing there. Reading and writing were taught simultaneously. The Psalter and the Book of Hours were the textbooks of little Bulgarians and by the end of their studies, they nearly knew these by heart. The written text was first spelled, letters were put together into syllables, and only then was the whole word pronounced. All this was done collectively and aloud, creating an indescribable noise in class.

Primary education at the parish school went on for 3 years and provided the rudiments of literacy. If one wished to continue one's education, he had to attend a monastery school. Especially popular were the schools around Turnovo, attended by pupils from distant places. It was there, among the best ecclesiastical wisdom, that the Bulgarian intellectual elite formed.

Medieval Bulgaria had a particular respect for learning, as it brought man closer to the knowledge of God and eternity. But if someone was attracted by heretical writings, even if the most knowledgeable of men, he would be worthy of contempt only, as each phenomenon of reality was judged only by its relevance to achieving salvation.

Such was also the attitude to common human suffering caused by disease. In the 13-14th centuries the mortality rate was high. The average life expectancy for Bulgarians was 50. Living to be 60 was living to a hoary age. After God's scourge, the plague, Bulgarians suffered most from

broken limbs, leprosy\*, and overeating. Most medicines were taken from nature: herbs, citrus fruit, rosewater, sugar and salt. The healer was an important figure in the Bulgarian society, though the means of his trade were quite limited: counting the pulse, bloodletting, and diet.

In any case, however, care for the sick engaged the whole society, not just sick people and their relatives. Even the demented, thought of as possessed by evil spirits, were not isolated from the society of Christians in hopes of driving these spirits out of them. The Church built hospitals and asylums for them, but the common practice was to let them live with the sound. Thus medieval Bulgarians developed habits of communicating with people different from them and treating them with care.

## Church and city

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The parish church was the natural centre of the city district. Around it the homes of medieval Bulgarians were clustered, as different as their inhabitants were. Half-sunken poor men's homes stood next to the rich residences of the nobility. The district's whole life was centred in the church, and the various functions of this small society religious, administrative, cultural, economic were concentrated in the figure of the priest. Property transactions, testaments, and matrimonial relations were settled predominantly in the church. This explains why its very building was given such close attention. Everything the burghers could donate was used to fulfill their desire for a more beautiful church than their neighbours'.

Bulgarian master masons showed their best in constructing Christian temples. There were more than 50 churches in Turnovo alone. They were small but their building technique alter-



nated, with elegant effect, brickwork with ashlar. Their external decoration used the work of stonecutters, masters of coloured pottery detail, and frequently master wall painters as well.

The district church cultivated something that makes possible city life in general: the habit of communicating with others different from yourself. Of course, there were sharp social and property contrasts in the city, but church life in the district gave rich and poor, merchants and nobles, the chance to meet often and discuss problems needing their common effort. According to Orthodox canons even the election of a priest required the participation of all believers in the parish irrespective of status. Thus, together with the essentials of the creed, the Bulgarian of the Middle Ages assimilated the conduct of a citizen.

The parish was a society of people sharing the same faith. The foreigners in the Bulgarian city Jews, Catholics, Armenians lived in their own districts built up in the vicinity of their churches. But no one could be totally isolated in the city, for it was the site of active trade, thus of contacts. True, these were not established either easily or quickly. Sometimes hostility against foreigners and people of different faiths came to the fore. But in the final reckoning, contacts always prevailed.

## **D** The whirl of everyday

Differently than modern life, daily life for the medieval Bulgarian was motley and intense. Disease was radically different from health, suffering from joy, ill luck from good fortune. At a time when the terrible dark and biting cold of winter were real disasters, warm clothing, a flaming fire, wine and a good joke could be the best embodiment of worldly happiness. With

death possible anytime, even the simplest pleasure easily grew into an occasion for unbelievable merry-making.

Various sides of life were flagrantly and abruptly displayed before everybody's eyes. Social status, reputation, and trade could easily be read from one's dress. Jews wore long gaberdines, Byzantines snow-white tunics. To everybody's fear and envy, the Bolyars walked around in the blaze of their armour and decorations. The trial of a criminal, the appearance of a peddler with his merchandise, weddings and funerals were all accompanied by a lot of cries, processions, weeping, and music.

The very style of life involved sharp contrasts. Frequent fasts alternated with long-lasting festivals, abstinence with overeating. The Christian festive season was long, occasionally lasting for 8 days. Starting with a prayer and a ceremonious church service, it went on with general merry-making, songs, dances, spectacles, and crammed tables. The days of the local saint or the important festivals in the church calendar were celebrated as richly as the events related to the ruler: his ascension, marriage, or the birth of an heir. The hunt, the king's hunt in particular, was an especially motley spectacle for the whole town. Everybody would go out on such occasions to watch the endless procession of richly clad riders accompanied by hooting horns and the bark of a thousand dogs.

Nobility and common folk alike enjoyed public spectacles: wrestlers, jugglers, and beast-tamers. These accompanied feasts and fairs when the whole population would mix together in a noisy crowd, obliterating differences of religion, reputation, sex, and nationality. The permanent contrasts of everyday life stirred the minds and moved the hearts of everyone. They ignited passions: now rudeness, intemperance, and cruelty, now a sophisticated aspiration after the intellectual and spiritual life.



The Orthodox Church never attempted to efface this variety and impose on earth the model of God's kingdom. It poured out damnations against superstition, the abuse of bodily pleasure, and greed, but was quite suspicious of any attempt to bring ascetic monastic life into

the everyday world. Thanks to the Church the crudity and fascination of the mundane were inimitably blended with the sublime ideal of Christianity. This union gave birth to the faith of every day, Christianity's most vital doctrine, which resisted the adversities of Bulgarian history.

### CHECK-UP

1. *How did the Bulgarian Church fashion the life of each believer ?*
2. *How did the ethic of Christianity regulate social relations ?*
3. *Describe one day in a medieval Bulgarian citizen's life.*
4. *Did the church play any role in shaping one's relation to "the other"? Give your reasons.*

## CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

# 37

### THE OTTOMAN TURKS – THE SECRET OF A QUICK RISE

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#### **A** The time of misfortune: the Balkans in the middle of the 14th century

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In the middle of the 14th century the Balkan peninsula was in a sad political condition. The disintegration of the Serbian kingdom after Dushan's death in 1355 increased the number of small Balkan states. Their rulers could not hope to dominate over the others, even their nearest neighbours, but military conflict was the preferred way of settling the relations between them. The resources that went into the never-ending wars unbearably increased the bur-

den of taxes and engendered riots. With the spirit of war encroaching on all sides and criminals freely walking the highways, traditional communications disintegrated and production declined. Uncertainty drove villagers into the fortified cities and the crops produced by those who stayed with the land did not feed the entire population.

On top of all this were the curses of plague (1347 and 1351) and draught, which increased mortality to unprecedented rates. In the middle of the 14th century depopulation became a chronic problem for the Balkans. The demographic collapse had its dangerous psychological effects, as well. Before the



sight of deserted acres, decimated towns, and enemies threatening on all sides, people got completely discouraged and preferred to withdraw in hopes of avoiding the dangers they could not face. The mood was especially dangerous given the fact that Balkan medieval society was founded on centralization.

Centralized power permanently regulated relations between the nobility and other social strata. The aristocrats were above all "men in service". They were given a number of privileges, but there was always a central power above them which controlled their actions and could take everything away from them. The tsar or emperor exercised this power and the peasant who demanded justice from his tsar against a royal official's arbitrary acts was not just a fairy tale character.

The crisis began when there was no longer any adequate power underlying this centralized rule. The reasons were various but the result was always the same separatism. The aristocrat could then decide that he had enough power to set up his own state, not so big and mighty but submitting only to his own will. The local ruler owed his power to his origin and his strength. The only power coming from God was still that given to the tsar in the act of coronation but, forced by circumstances to make greater or smaller concessions to a mighty aristocracy, the tsar was incapable of protecting all of his subjects. Thus the time-sanctioned order in the Orthodox world was undermined and man was gradually alienated from the state. This was a favourable climate for riot and heresy, more ruthless and extreme as the crisis grew deeper. The urban poor recognized the nobility as their foes, but behind the outbursts of cruelty and fanaticism was the miserable despair of the subject, who would at any cost gladly resume his former well-being.

## **B** The Ottomans: another evil

In the beginning of March 1354 a strong earthquake destroyed the walls of the Byzantine fortress of Galipoli (now Gelibolu). The defenceless city fell an easy prey to the Ottomans, who settled one of their garrisons there. Allied to John Cantacuzene (1347-1354) in his wars of the late 1340s, after the fall of Galipoli the Ottomans started a new conquest, this time of the Balkans. The devastation they left behind inspired real horror. The only properly organized attempt to resist came from the brothers Vulkashin and Uglesha, independent rulers of Macedonia. On September 26, 1371 their troops suffered an overwhelming defeat at Chernomen (near Maritsa) whose resonance caused a serious upheaval in the Orthodox world. A little later the Byzantine emperor and the Bulgarian tsar were forced to acknowledge the Sultan's supremacy. The scale of this subordination was tolerable, amounting to moderate taxation and military support. But the compulsion for Christians to fight in a non-Christian army against their fellow-Christians on the Balkans was humiliating enough. Moreover, it came from an enemy whose existence had been totally unknown to the world some hundred years before.

The Ottoman state in Asia Minor had been founded by Ottoman I (1299-1324). He was primarily the ruler of a semi-dependent beylik (administrative district) in the Seldjuk Sultanate. Circumstance as well as personal energy soon made him an independent ruler, and the Turkish tribes united under his rule called themselves Ottomans. Ottoman's ambitious conquests in the Byzantine northwest of Asia Minor needed human resources, of which the handful of Ottomans were quite short. His resounding victories, however, helped him carry out a union which seemed a natural impossibility. Many dif-



ferent Nomadic tribes of Islamic confession marched under the victor's banners. Thus the Sultan's subjects comprised people of various ethnic origins, with Turks prevailing as late as the second half of the 14th century. There were also a lot of Christian soldiers of fortune, who had been attracted by the great rights bestowed upon the Sultan's soldiers in the newly conquered lands. They changed their confession and marched with the troops of Islam for the sake of would-be profit.

Ottoman's dynasty, one of the longest in history (14th-20th century), had sultans of remarkable qualities. Two types of rulers conquerers and administrators fortunately succeeded each other on the Ottoman throne in the 14th -15th centuries. Under Orkhan (1324-1362) the Ottomans became the primary power on the boundary between Asia and Europe. Without interrupting the conquest, Murad I (1362-1389) was the first to oversee the administration of conquered lands. He turned the Byzantine city of Adrianopolis (now Odrin) into Edirne, Ottoman capital on the Balkans. In his time all conquered lands were divided into beylerbeiliks, vast zones following the borders of previous administrative divisions. The European possessions comprised the beylerbeilik of Rumely. The rational system of government established by Murad soon bore its fruit. In less than two decades the Ottomans were constantly settled in Southeast Thrace, from where they advanced in three directions: to Aegean Thrace, Sofia and Dobrudja.

Under Murad's son, Bajazeth I (1389-1402), the Ottoman state owed its glamour more to military success than government. Bajazeth was given the name of "The Lightning" in the battle of Kosovo pole on June 15, 1389. He immediately mastered the situation after his father's assassination and defeated the Serbs. With all the energy of the devastating warrior he ended the conquest of Asia Minor and by 1392 he ruled the whole of Macedonia.

Bajazeth dedicated three years (1393-1396) to the conquest of Bulgaria, turning its dependence into direct submission.

In the course of seven years (1394-1401) the Ottomans besieged Constantinople. On the eve of fulfilling the testament of Islam and capturing the capital of the Christian world, Bajazeth confronted another, no less ambitious Islam ruler, Tamerlane. In 1402 at the city of Ankara he suffered his one terrible defeat and, in a little while, died. This delayed the fall of Constantinople for six decades, slightly loosening the iron ring of siege about the holy city.



## The fall of Bulgaria

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The Ottoman victory at Chernomen, which so startled the Balkan rulers, came only a few months after Ivan Alexander's death. At that time Thrace was already under Ottoman dominance; Macedonia and the Morava valley were torn among a host of independent rulers; and even Misia was divided into three distinct parts, the Vidin kingdom of Ivan Sratsimir, the Turnovo kingdom of Ivan Shishman, and the Dobrudja principality. The division into Turnovo and Vidin kingdoms was carried out by Ivan Alexander himself, who even in his lifetime divided his possessions between his two sons without being able to prevent their severe confrontation. Ivan Sratsimir (1356-1396) broke with Turnovo when his father was still alive and his brother Ivan Shishman (1371-1395) was appointed heir to the Turnovo throne. He used all means to defend his independence and called himself "Tsar of the Bulgarians". The confrontation was so strong that it encroached upon the unity of the Bulgarian church. The bishops of Vidin and Dobrudja overthrew the supremacy of the Turnovo Patriarch and declared themselves directly subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.



Paralysed by internal dissent, Bulgaria lacked the opportunity to support the struggle of the Bulgarians in the Rhodopes and Macedonia, whose resistance to the advance of the Ottomans was heroic but doomed. Even when in 1373 Ivan Shishman was compelled to swear vassalage to the Sultan, his conflict with the Vidin kingdom was still in progress.

The Bulgarian Tsar broke his vassal obligations and refused to send troops to Murad in 1387, when the Ottomans suffered a heavy defeat at the town of Plochnik on the river Topolnitsa (now in Serbia). In the following year a powerful Ottoman army led by Ali Pasha carried out a punitive military expedition in northeast Bulgaria. The Turnovo kingdom was reduced to its capital and a couple of Danubian fortresses, while Ivan Shishman was forced to beg for peace and protection. In the same year, 1388, Ivan Sratsimir also acknowledged the supremacy of the Sultan under the known conditions: paying taxes to him and sending him troops of his own.

All this greatly prepared the way for Bajazeth. In 1393, after a heavy three-month siege, he conquered Turnovo and severely massacred the population. In a little while Nikopol was captured and the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Shishman died there.

In 1396 the anti-Ottoman crusade summoned by the Hungarian king, Sigismund, reached northwest Bulgaria. When the crusaders entered Vidin, Ivan Sratsimir declared himself ally to the Hungarian king, and after the defeat at Nikopol (September 25) he was forced to share the fate of the defeated. Bajazeth's troops entered Vidin and Ivan Sratsimir himself was sent in shackles to Asia Minor. The last patch of Bulgarian land lost its independence. At the same time the principality of Dobrudja was also conquered by the Turks and subjected to the rule of the Byzantine emperor.



## The Shadow of the Union

In the 15th century the last Paleologs' attempts to stop the Ottoman invasion with Western help encountered two enormous obstacles: the conditions offered by Rome and the discontent of the Orthodox church endorsed by their own subjects.

The union had few sincere supporters among the Orthodox hierarchies. The emperors were compelled to exert pressure on the others. The Ferrara – Florence Synod, summoned to sign the union, dragged on for two years (1438-1439). Fear for the Empire and Constantinople, together with the humiliation and deprivations the Orthodox bishops were subjected to, played their role. Everybody but Marco of Ephesus signed the union. When he heard this, Pope Eugenius IV said curtly, "Well, if somebody did not sign, we have done nothing". Most of the Orthodox bishops, at that, renounced their signatures on their return. The creed and the experience of Orthodoxy which stood behind Marco of Ephesus' resistance did not allow confusing the great issue of ecclesiastical unity with political calculation and base motive.

Incidentally, the Pope proved very much in the right. The crusade of the chivalric army of 30 000 men, led by the Polish-Hungarian king, Wladislaw Jagiellon, suffered an overwhelming defeat near Varna on November 10, 1444. Though covering with fame the names of Wladislaw called Varnencic and Janos Hunyadi, the selfless fight of the knights was a negligible political effect of the union compared to the discontent this union stirred.

The alienation that had started with the Great Schism of the 11th century had turned, as early as the 13th,



into mutual hate. "Latins" in the East and "Greeks" in the West became terms of abuse, synonyms of evil and hostility. Loyalty to one's own creed was confused, for centuries on end, with a primitive rejection of everything foreign. From high theology the conflict descended to the people only to reveal a much more grotesque side of itself. A final attempt to revive the spirit of the union, the singing of mass after the foreign fashion at Saint Sophia on December 12, 1452, brought the Byzantine capital to the verge of rebellion. Hate gave birth to Luca Notaris's famous saw, "I would see the Turkish turban rather than the Latin tiara rule over the royal city". His words were prophetic.

The siege started only a few months later. Constantinople had a

handful of defenders against the numerous Ottoman army. The last emperor, Constantine XI Paleologus (1449-1453) himself, led the desperate warriors of the capital's garrison, dying sword in hand like a common soldier. His body was recognized only from the Emperor's purple boots. On May 29, 1453 Mehmed II the Conqueror entered Constantinople and in the course of three days his troops pillaged the royal city, destroying everything they could not carry away. The patriarch's cathedral, Saint Sophia, was turned into a mosque. This was the end of "The New Rome", the end of an entire human epoch. Constantinople became Stambul. The Empire, for which some were ready to sacrifice Orthodoxy itself, no longer existed.

### **CHECK-UP**

1. Describe the political and economic situation on the Balkans at the end of the 14th century. Explain its causes.

2. What was the route of the Ottomans to the Balkans and what were the reasons for their success ?

3. Follow the concrete events and explain the causes that brought about the fall of Bulgaria under the Ottoman rule.

4. Why didn't union policy itself help the emperors of Constantinople against the Ottoman invasion ? How did this affect the fate of Byzantium ?



## 38

## THE AGE OF TRANSITION: WESTERN EUROPE IN THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

### **A** Plague, hunger and war

In the beginning of the 14th century, after an interruption of four centuries, Europe was facing hunger again. Three exceptionally cold and wet years (1315-1317) caused a real famine, especially in Northern Europe.

Only three decades later the starving Europeans were overwhelmed by the Black Death of 1347. Poor hygiene spread the epidemic catastrophically: 40 million died out of the total 120 million European population. Labour resources were drastically shortened. Waste lands appeared and the cultivation of new land was unthinkable. Incomes went down, while prices and taxes were on the increase. Afraid of losing their serfs, certain lords increased their bonds of dependence. Frightened in turn, certain serfs spilled the blood of the lords they had long been living on good terms with. The spirit of rebellion lastingly settled in towns.

The three century-old conflict between the French and the English kings reached a climax in the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). As a French duke, the English king owed an oath of vassalage to his French lord. But when the French king died without leaving male heirs, the problem of who was to inherit the crown of the Capetians boiled over. Both the

king's brother, the Duke of Valois, and the grandson of Philip IV the Fair, English King Edward III (1327-1377); had a claim to the title. Thus the longest war in the history of Europe started as a family argument. During its first decades this war was regarded by people in both England and France as the business of the nobility. Things changed in the beginning of the 15th century when the English succeeded in capturing Paris and forced the French king to disinherit his son, Charles.

In the late 1420s the city of Orleans, key to Southern France, was besieged. Salvation came through a miracle. In 1428 the invincible English were beaten by a small regiment led by a young village girl, Jeanne of Picardy, who claimed to be inspired by the Virgin herself. The decisive turnover came in 1429 when Charles was crowned at Rheims. This coronation and the iron-clad girl who from that moment bore the name of the Virgin of Orleans, changed the fortunes of the war. To the French it was no longer a family row for the Capetian crown but an encroachment upon the union between God and France. It was also an encroachment upon the holy union of the French king and his nation.

The peace treaty of 1453 restored the territories of France. At the end of the 15th century it already had its present-



day territorial outlines. The enormous potential of the union of king and nation shaped France as a primary power influencing Europe for several centuries.

England's fate was somewhat different. Between 1455 and 1485 the English crown was the goal of a ruinous civil war between the royal houses of York and Lancaster. This confrontation, which decimated the island's ancient aristocracy, became known, after the colour of the parties' coats of arms, as the "War of the White (York) and Red (Lancaster) Roses". Finally the Tudor dynasty came to the throne. It was going to channel English energies in a different direction, towards the oceans of the world. Much later, England's apparent neglect of Europe would make it a world power.

## **B** The crisis of Papacy: the Great Schism

After the 70 years of its Avignon (Babylonian) captivity, in 1378 the Church of Rome chose Pope Urban VI. The multitude in front of the Pope's cathedral welcomed his ascension with cries of "Italian, Italian!" Indignant with the pressure on them, the French cardinals returned to Avignon and elected another pope there, Clement VII. The fact that he was French in turn stirred joyful cries in Avignon. Thus the Western church had two popes, each claiming to be the lawful one and anathematizing the other. This was the beginning of the Great Schism (1378-1417), which in the course of about 40 years would divide the Catholic Church and destroy the papal authority. At that time a number of popes succeeded each other in each of the camps. France and the Spanish kingdoms supported the Pope in Avignon, while the German world and most Italian states backed the one in Rome. For Frenchmen, Italians and Spaniards, the

Church was becoming a national rather than all-Christian institution.

Superficially, order seemed restored at the specially evoked Council of Constanz, which lasted about four years (1414-1418). All popes were deposed and Pope Martin V, acknowledged by all Catholics, was elected. But the Western Christian world was never again united under the Pope's supremacy to the extent it had been earlier. On the contrary, many local rulers succeeded in establishing control over the bishops in their lands.

The Council of Constanz also denounced the idea of ecclesiastical reform born at the time of the Great Schism. The English clergyman and theologian, John Wycliffe, was posthumously condemned as a heretic and his bones were excavated, to be burned at the stake. Wycliffe preached that Christians had to obey the Bible rather than the Pope. He even translated the Bible from Latin into English to make it more readily accessible to believers. Wycliffe openly accused the Pope and the high clergy of being absorbed only in their own possessions and riches, oblivious to their spiritual mission. He called upon them to give out their wealth to lay rulers and take up the care for Christians' salvation.

In Bohemia Wycliffe's ideas found an eager supporter in Jan Huss (1369-1415). As Rector of Prague (Charles) University Huss became famous for his zealous sermons scourging the life of the Pope and the high clerics. The fact that the language of the sermons was Czech also contributed to their exceptional resonance. Summoned before the Council of Constanz and sentenced as a heretic, Huss refused to plead guilty. In the 15th century such impertinence was punished at the stake. Its fires would break the Czechs' link to Rome for a long time. Jan Huss was canonized as a martyr and became a national hero. His followers, the Hussites, took arms. For 15 years Bohemia was plunged



into the whirl of the Hussite Wars (1419-1434) in which Czechs fought Czech enemies usually seen as the Papacy and the Germans. The thunder of this long-lasting conflict painfully shook Central Europe. Only towards the middle of the 15th century, when the dynasty of the Austrian Hapsburg dukes ascended the throne of the Holy Roman Empire, did the region see the first marks of painful stabilization.

## **C The dispersal of power: the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation**

The conflict between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire bore bitter fruit. With Friedrich II's successors the idea of the political union of the Western Christian world suffered a defeat. At the end of the 13th century the borders of the Empire included German dukedoms, the kingdom of Bohemia, and a number of small states in northern and central Italy and the Netherlands. Two decades without an emperor (1250-1273) had considerably consolidated the power of local dukes. They already had the right to administer supreme justice in their own lands, and they kept armies of their own, minted money, and collected taxes for themselves from their subjects. Most German dukes successfully built stable and centralized governments, and they all benefited from a weak imperial rule that could not question their privileges. Local interest ousted everything else.

In the middle of the 14th century this distribution of power was recorded by an important document regularizing the election of the emperor. Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg issued the Golden Bull, a law establishing a collegium of seven influential lay and ecclesiastical rulers authorized to enthrone and dethrone the emperors. It included three archbishops, of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne, as well as four

kings: of Bohemia, Saxony, Brandenburg, and the Rhine.

Divided into more than 350 little states, the Germanic world lived under the sign of internecine war for over a century (mid-14th – mid-15th century). The lack of a natural geographical centre made the issue of Germany's unity even more poignant. All the German rulers, however, unanimously believed that the choice of an emperor was the business of Germans rather than the Pope, and at the end of the 15th century this view demanded a rewording of the state's name: "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation".

There was also a general agreement among mid-15th century German rulers about one more issue: the Emperor had to be weak to guarantee all-German unity. The Duke of Austria was the most acceptable figure. He was crowned emperor under the name Friedrich III (1440-1493). He never had military luck but he siezed the chance to appoint his son heir apparent to the emperor's throne. Thus the crown of the Holy Roman Empire stayed with the Hapsburg family. By and by they successfully built up the solid foundations of power based on a reasonable and fairly efficient matrimonial policy. Thus during the reign of Friedrich II's son, Maximilian I, together with his wife, Marie of Burgundy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the Dukedom of Burgundy came under Hapsburg rule.

## **D The glory of Burgundy**

Nowhere did the late medieval spirit of chivalry possess such penetrating sensibility as in Burgundy. Never before had Europe witnessed such glamour and pride as in the dazzling court etiquette of the dukes of Burgundy.

The entire history of the Dukedom of Burgundy is a history of rapid and impressive progress. From the end of the



14th century to the 1470s it gradually encompassed vast territories of present-day Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, and northeastern and western France. All this was the outcome of the exceptional energy of four remarkable men whose efforts in times of both war and peace bore rich fruit: good communications, well-ordered administration, and just laws. Won through the swords of capable war generals, these differing achievements were permeated by the spirit of justice and civilization typical of the dukes of Burgundy. Along with the economic progress in the 14-15th centuries came a remarkable flourishing of painting, sculpture, and music, as sparkling as Burgundean wine and as dedicated to external glamour as a Flemish baron.

In the beginning it resembled a resurrected chivalric ritual. In 1356 at the time of the Battle of Poitiers, the French king, Jean II the Good (1350-1364), was abandoned by his whole suite. Only his fourth son, Philip, stayed with his father. Equally loyal to his chivalric oath and his filial duty, the 14-year old youth put up his arms only after his father commanded him, as a king should command his true vassal. For his exceptional virtue Philip was awarded with the Dukedom of Burgundy, and was given the privilege of bearing his chivalric name, the Bold.

Together with the Dukedom Philip the Bold's heirs inherited an exceptional sense of chivalric honour. Instead of their family name they used their chivalric nicknames: Jean the Fearless (1404-1419), Philip the Good (1419-67), and finally Charles the Bold. (1467-1477). If something stood above their honour, it was their famous pride. This is especially true of Charles the Bold. Under his rule the Dukedom of Burgundy reached the apogee of its power. It was short only of a king's crown. The German emperor agreed to a coronation and arrived to attend it. Everything was settled except only one issue:

which king was to occupy the honorary place at the church service? The dispute ended in an open quarrel. Before all courtiers Charles, who believed that his honour was offended, officially challenged his rival. Pride was more important to the Dukes of Burgundy than the crown itself.

This pride found adequate expression in a glorious court etiquette. Living by the rules of chivalric honour was the norm at court. The sophisticated and exquisite courtly life of Burgundian dukes was closely imitated by all European dynasties. The Hapsburgs preserved it as late as the 20th century. Dinner at the court of Charles the Bold, with pages standing respectfully behind the seats of the invited and musicians starting to play right after the second glass of wine, looked like a theatrical show.

In the 15th century this elaborate etiquette still meant that power was the sovereign's own business. Charles the Bold entertained himself constantly inventing newer and stricter rules which he personally obeyed, only to invent new rules later. But he was quite unwavering in one thing: power and glamour had to be displayed before everybody. Such was the purpose of the weekly public reception, where each subject could personally approach him. War itself existed for etiquette's sake. Because the German emperor faint-heartedly rejected the challenge to personal combat, thereby committing an unpardonable offense, the Duke of Burgundy answered with war. In 1475 he besieged the city of Neuss and the world of chivalry was reborn on the spot. The day and the night before the attack were full of the heroes' cries. The coloured feathers and the gifts from one's beloved upon the helmets, even the cries evoked the colourful world of medieval warfare. Charles's camp itself was glittering with the luxury of the court. Some knights' tents looked like castles - they had their towers, galleries and even little flower gardens. In that



world military tactics were valued only in aesthetic terms. But beauty does not always win and it did not win at Neuss.

In the 15th century the day of war as artefact was already gone. Charles the Bold was surrounded by enemies for whom victory was more precious than honour. They often attacked from behind and at night. They withdrew without

honour to attack from an ambush. At the end of the Middle Ages the outcome of the war between chivalric honour and advantage was predetermined. In 1477 Charles the Bold met his death in a chivalric combat. Soon afterwards the rich Burgundian kingdom was divided between the Hapsburgs and the French kings.

### CHECK-UP

1. *How was the authority of the Papacy undermined and which power was capable of assuming its place ?*

2. *What were the results of the long-lasting conflict between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy ?*

3. *What was the obstacle preventing the union of the German world ?*

4. *In what way did the dukes of Burgundy and the Italian humanists overcome their dissatisfaction with the reality? Show the similarities and the differences between them.*

## CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

# 39

## THE WANING OF THE MIDDLE AGES



### The world of passion

Never had the thought of death been so heavily imposed on man as by the late Middle Ages (14th – 15th century). Life passed under the shadow of the constant reminder: Remember thou shalt die. Of course, in previous ages, too, religion had forced man to seriously consider his death, but prescriptions of the pious life had concerned monks above all. Only in the mid-14th century

the plague, hunger and war endowed with a striking power the preacher's loud voice, exposing the vices of luxury and worldly vanity. Amidst the general cry of the mob which accompanied his words, sinners fell to the ground and bitterly lamented their sins. This age gave birth to the "burning of vanities," the public stakes of the 14th and 15th centuries. Citizens dutifully threw various objects of luxury into them, thus turning their rejection of earthly pleasure into a solemn public ceremony.



At the end of the 14th century the word of the preachers was complemented by a new genre of visual art, the woodcut, which soon became popular with all social classes. Unlike other genres, it was inexpensive and easily accessible. But what made it indispensable was its potential to represent the inevitability of death through obvious and immediate examples. The exact, naturalistic copy of the dying man is an image both simple and didactic. It brought into European art the impact of the everyday. Realism in art was born. Thus appeared the Dance Macabre, one of the most popular subjects of the 14th century. It represented a dance in which everybody took part: skeletons, men and women, old people and children, popes and kings.

The chilling fear of death thoroughly robbed medieval man of his soul's peace. Fiery passion was everywhere. If you caught the appropriate moment, with God's help you could succeed in anything. The endless conflicts in 14th century Italian cities created golden opportunities for ambitious men. Using his will power and talent, one could triumph over circumstances, even using them to make further gains. Such was Cosimo Medici, who mastered the situation in Florence. He became the factual ruler of a republic, later a "principality," who demonstrated how personal merit can displace heredity.

At the end of the Middle Ages good manners demanded that any form of excitement including joy should be expressed through weeping and moans. These were regarded as sublime and beautiful. In the 15th century the praise of the present was still regarded as bad manners. Humanist scholars were the first who were enthusiastic about their own time, their excitement provoked by the discovery of ancient wisdom. But this was the scholar's triumph over his books. Where was the joy of life then? It was in the past. To Burgundy these were the glorious times of knight-hood. To the Italian humanists of the 14th-

15th centuries this wonderful life was connected with antiquity.

What did all this mean? Man realized the discrepancy between his spiritual aspiration and daily life. He had to find a solution to it. According to the age's notions man's sins were cause of all evil. Consequently man had to undergo a rebirth. The "rebirth" of man was a basic issue in all mystical movements flourishing in 14th -15th century Europe. Thus, "Imitatio Christi" by the German monk Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471) became the most widely read book of mid-15th century after the Bible. According to Thomas a Kempis, through long exercises in contemplation and complete concentration of thought and feeling, man could seemingly die only to be born again, to be "reborn". Thus under the influence of mysticism\* and the Church, personal consciousness was developed and a strong sense of selfhood appeared in the Christian's soul. Only a step was needed from there to the thought that there were no limits to the human will. Only if he wished, through his own efforts man could become godlike, without the mediation of the Church.

The step was undertaken by Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). In his famous "Oration on the Dignity of Man" he openly declared that only through his will power, without God's co-operation, man could become God's equal. Such views could be nourished only by a culture alienated from the Church, the secular culture of 14th-15th century Italy.

## **B** The Italian Renaissance

As early as the beginning of the 13th century Italy had been showing the signs of a growing economic activity which led in the 14th and 15th centuries to unprecedented economic prosperity. Its foundations were laid by the permanent



trade exchange between Italian cities and Byzantium and the Near East, guaranteeing the import of silk, perfumes, and spices, much sought after in Western Europe. This profitable trade concentrated huge capital in the hands of Italian merchants but its management required more than mere bargaining skills. It required improvement of roads, mutual agreement on the protection of merchants, the effective organization of production itself. Profits were enormous. Striving after an infinite accumulation of riches immeasurably surpassing personal needs defined the energy of the active man. Ready to take any risks, he owed his prosperity to his personal decisiveness and judgement, which helped him triumph even over morality itself. Personal merit left its inimitable mark on the whole of late medieval culture.

Such great undertakings and results, however, required literacy. The contractor, the merchant, the banker above all had to be well educated. In Italy these needs created the taste for a kind of learning that valued practical application. Such needs grew out of the medieval university's "studia humanitatis" course: medicine, law, classical philology, etc. By chance the Italian universities, even the most famous one at Bologna, did not have a theological faculty and divinity, the crowning branch of medieval learning, was not studied there.

Moreover, in the 14th-15th centuries Italians with a secular education began to critically treat earlier conceptions of Christian education. The new attitude was voiced by the humanists such as the poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), the epic poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), political figures like Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), lawyers like Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), etc. They all worked out a special measure for their views, the measure of language. Latin had been a living language up to that point, in so far as the Church had constantly been using it. Humanists, however, regarded it

as corrupted, parading it as a proof of the death of the antiquity they were going to restore. At the end of the 14th century their "purified" Latin was already studied by all educated people in Italy, and later in other parts of Europe, too; it persisted as an integral part of high European culture as late as the 18th century.

When they demanded that their contemporaries wrote like Cicero, the humanists themselves turned Latin into a dead language, robbing it of the possibility to change and develop. This in turn promoted the "rebirth" of and gave advantage to national languages. There is more to it. In the Italian humanists' longing for the language of Cicero, one could read their dream of the times when their country dominated the world, and when Latin's cultural authority of Latin was supported by Rome's military might. This dream, so attractive and so dangerous, marked the outlines of nationalism, a phenomenon to characterize European culture ever since.

The birth of a national consciousness was obvious in the Italian attitude to the Roman Church, as well. Unlike the other Christians of the West, the humanists thought of the Pope not only as head of the Universal Church, but also a leader of the Italian Church and an important political figure. Due to these characteristics the Italian Renaissance treated the church, medieval as it still was, with indifference. More and more frequently they looked for spiritual fulfillment beyond its confines. The creed which in the Middle Ages socially placed and defined the individual was now becoming much more of a private issue. This marked the beginning of the age of religious individualism.

The changes in art which started in Italy towards the end of the Middle Ages is what impresses one most. When religion grew into a private occupation, what was displayed before everybody's eyes could hardly take a religious shape. Secular art flourished. In the beginning of the 15th century this growth gave its most



glorious fruit in Florence, the heart of Tuscany. Literally over a couple of decades in painting, sculpture and architecture, new forms symmetrical, proportional, and sublime, as the Tuscan masters thought the works of ancient artists looked were imposed. It was for this reason that their glamorous style was called "Renaissance", or revival of art.

It was only the ruins of antiquity, however, that were preserved in the 15th century. This made masters like Masaccio (1401-1428) and Fra Angelico (1400-1455) in painting, Donatello (1386-1466) in sculpture, and Phillippo Brunelleschi (1377-1466) in architecture replace the missing models with a more careful study of nature, yet without imitating it in their works. Renaissance art valued the master's skill in recreating "reality" by representing an ideal world. Thus the artist became a maker which caused an important shift in European art. The author came to be valued along with the work. Born in the Middle Ages, the art of the Italian Renaissance marked the appearance of a new culture, more interested in harmony and symmetry than in the soul's salvation.

## **C** Europe in the end of the 15th century

At the end of the 15th century Europe presented a peculiar picture. The advance of the Western Christian world towards the East had failed. The Church was divided. The Ottomans had conquered nearly the whole of the Orthodox East. Instead of fighting for Jerusalem, soon Western Europe was fighting for Vienna.

The long-standing rivalry between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire turned the lands of Italy and Germany into a motley mixture of smaller or bigger states, which anticipated the future political parcellation of Central Europe. This troublesome region would remain the arena of con-

frontation between the Germanic and the Slavic worlds.

German pressure on the east forced the three great powers of Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary to act. At the end of the 14th century Poland and Lithuania formed a union, consolidated by the Polish queen's marriage to Lithuania's Great Prince. In 1410 the Polish-Lithuanian army defeated the Teutonic Order near Grunewald. This marked the beginning of Polish dominance. In the end of the 15th century Poland was the biggest Christian state in Europe.

The Scandinavian world unfolded similarly. Ethnic proximity there and the skillful policy of Danish Queen Margaret resulted in the formation of a unified state. Again through a union, the one of 1397, her heir, Eric of Pomerania, was crowned king of three kingdoms: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Both Polish and Danish rule, however, were quite brief.

Europe's periphery offered a very different picture. It was there that the powerful national states of the late Middle Ages England, France, Russia, Spain had been formed. Their might had two solid supports. A strong centralised power, on the one hand, succeeded in subjecting numerous human, institutional and ideological resources. The foundations of centralised monarchy were laid there. Dominated by the monarch, these countries were ruled with the help of a considerable administration. Order and the defence of borders were guaranteed by a standing army, and numerous royal officials monitored observation of the kingdom's laws even in its most remote provinces. The second equally important support was national sentiment. The idea that all subjects and their king belong to one vast community helped unite the energy of those considerable groups of people in the name of their common interests. In the 15th century these were the interests of the nation.



At the end of the 15th century the centre of activity moved from Central and Southeastern Europe (Italy, Germany, the Balkans) to the continent's margins.

## **D** The last crusade: the discovery of America

For four whole centuries (11th-15th century) Spain had been fascinated by the idea of crusade. The incessant struggle against the Moslems on the Iberian peninsula developed in the Castileans, Galicians, and Catalonians a peculiar sense of common "electness". They thought of crusades as a special mission entrusted to Spain by God. The political union of the Spanish kingdoms became a fact after the marriage of the two most influential rulers of the peninsula: Isabel of Castille and Pedro of Aragon. Along with the last battles against Granada, the last stronghold of Islam on the peninsula, troops were gathered for a decisive march to free Jerusalem.

The highly charged 15th century inspired an interesting development in a dream typical of the whole medieval period, the dream of the fairy-tale Priest John's Kingdom. According to it Paradise was here on Earth, far east, beyond India. It was, of course, populated with Christians. God had rewarded their exceptional piety with fabulous plenty. The Kingdom of Priest John was home to the fountain of eternal youth and the

four rivers of Paradise took their source from there. Thrice a year their waters carried gold and precious stones all the way to India.

It is quite understandable why the wish to find a route to this dreamland never died. In the 15th century, however, land routes for such expeditions were controlled by the Moslems. There were only sea routes available. This desire required ships: light, fast, and mobile like the Spanish and Portuguese caravels. It also needed reliable compasses and maps. Finally, it required the willingness to cross the ocean and, in the name of God and the Church, search westward for a route to the East.

Circumstances drove to Spain, overwhelmed with the idea of a new crusade to the holy lands, a man of such qualities, the Genoese Christopher Columbus. Having the support of the Spanish Queen, in the summer of 1492 Columbus set sail from the port of Cadiz, equipped with three ships and 90 sailors on board. On October, 12 God rewarded his endeavour and he set foot on firm land. Now it is known to have been one of the Bahamas, but Columbus himself was quite assured he had discovered the route to West India, and he named the newly found land El Salvador, "the Saviour". He must have been the happiest man on earth then. Perhaps he thought of the gold that would equip the Christian warriors in their march on to Jerusalem.

Later this land was called America.

### **CHECK-UP**

1. Give the consequences of disasters, in the first half of the 14th century, on European economy and mental attitudes.
2. Describe the ideas that set the Italian Renaissance in motion.
3. Outline the distribution of power in late medieval Europe.
4. To which age did Christopher Columbus belong? Give your reasons.



## WORKSHOP:

### Medieval Europe 11th-15th Century: conflict and contact

**Task No.1.** Evaluate your own knowledge. Select and try to give answers to the level you wish to defend.

#### Satisfactory

1. Give the names of the Bulgarian kings who ruled in the 13th and 14th centuries.
2. With what events are the following years associated: 1235 1337 1396
3. Describe the medieval city, having in mind the structuring of city space, the government of cities, and the city spirit as expressed by the cathedral and the university.

*(If even good luck failed you in finding out the correct answers then you are in for a summer full of untiring and diligent effort like that of monks. Good luck in September!)*

#### Good

1. Give the names of the major representatives of Hesychasm in Byzantium and Bulgaria.
2. With what events are the following dates associated:  
March 9, 1230 1261 1417
3. Describe the characteristics of Mongol society having in mind their territory, way of life, religious tolerance, and social structure.

*(Love of any sphere of knowledge comes hard but your good mark already bespeaks a new attitude to the subject of history. If you happen to have some spare time in summer, do read something interesting and curious about the medieval man's world.)*

#### Excellent

1. Who were the new conquerors Europe faced in the 13th and 14th centuries?
2. What events do you relate to each of the following years: 1204 1371 1453
3. Explain the nature of Hesychasm, having in mind the time it was born; the meaning of its name; its progenitor; and the ideas that renovated Orthodoxy.

*(The authors congratulate you on your successful completion of the school year. They would be glad to have you doing history at university level in three years' time. If we part ways, however, we hope history persists as the reading of your leisure time).*

**Task No.2.** Analyse the historical document :

Read the document carefully and try to answer the following questions:

- When did the described event occur ?
- Whose subject was its author ?
- What is his attitude to the rulers mentioned in the document ?
- According to the document, what is the real benefit for the victor ?

"And Theodor ... being arrogant and behaving wilfully not only in the tsar's but in any kind of state affairs, always breaking the oaths and agreements with the neighbours, tore the pacts with Ivan Asen and marched against the Bulgarians ... Ivan Asen ... swept bravely in the midst of the battle, carrying, as some people say, Theodor's written oath on his banner. The



armies confronted each other about a place ... Klokotnitsa. And to put it all in brief, Theodor was totally defeated by both the Bulgarians and the Scythians.. Ivan Asen treated kindly the captured multitude... Everybody admired him and praised him for not raising arms against his own, nor staining himself with murders of Byzantines, as the Bulgarians before him. That is why he was loved not only by the Bulgarians but by the Byzantines, too ...”

**Task No.3.** Answer the historical question in written form :

What was the outcome of the European civilization's confrontation with the two great Asian empires: the Mongol and the Ottoman?

In your answer you can use the plan given below:

- Principles of the Mongol empire's organization and characteristics of the Ottoman structure of government.
- The expansion of the Mongols and the Ottomans in Europe and their administration of the conquered lands.
- The attitude of each invader towards people of other creeds.
- Europe's reaction to each of the invaders.
- The consequences of the two great invasions.



# GLOSSARY

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**ABBOT** (Latin) – the superior of an abbey of monks.

**ALTAR** (Latin) – a raised place or structure where sacrifices are offered and religious rites performed.

**ANTI-SEMITISM** (French) – showing hostility to the Jews for religious and racial reasons.

**ANATHEMA** (Greek) – a solemn ecclesiastical condemnation; excommunication from the Church.

**ANTICHRIST** (Greek) – the antagonist of Christ, expected to appear and reign over the world until overthrown at Christ's Second Coming; the devil, Satan.

**ANOINTMENT** – to apply oil to as a sign of consecration or sanctification in a sacred rite.

**ARBALEST** (Latin) – a medieval sophisticated crossbow in a wooden shaft for shooting arrows.

**ARCHAIC** (Greek) – belonging to a much earlier period, ancient.

**ASCETICISM** (Greek) – the religious doctrine that one can reach a higher spiritual state and sanctity by voluntary abstinence from worldly comforts and pleasures, rigorous self-discipline and self-denial, rigid fasting, prayer and seclusion.

**BACHELOR** (Latin) – the first degree given to a medieval university student.

**BULL** (Latin) – a formal document issued by the pope, written in Latin.

**CALIPHATE** (Arabic) – califate or kalifate: the office, jurisdiction, or reign of a caliph.

**CARDINAL** (Latin) – any of the members of the Sacred College, ranking next after the pope, who elect the pope and act as his chief counsellors.

**CADASTRE** (French) – an official register showing details of ownership, boundaries, and value of real property in a district, made for taxation purposes.

**CENTAUR** (Greek) – a mythical monster, half man and half horse.

**CHARTER** (Latin) – any formal writing in evidence of a grant, contract, or other transactions, conferring or confirming titles, rights, or privileges.

**CHURCH** (Greek) – the collective body of all Christians.

**CONCORDAT** (Latin) – a pact or treaty, esp. one between the Vatican and another state concerning the interests of religion in that state.;

**CONGLOMERATION** (Latin) – a conglomerate mass, a mass of miscellaneous things.

**CONGREGATION** – the group of persons habitually attending a given church, chapel, etc..

**CONCEPTION** (Latin) – notion, idea, design, or plan.

**CORPORATION** (Latin) – a group of people authorized by law to act as an individual and having its own powers, duties, and liabilities.

**CODE** (Latin) – a conventionalized set of principles, rules, or expectations.

**COUNT** (French) – any of various officials in the late Roman Empire and under various Germanic kings in the early Middle Ages.

**COUNTERFORT** (French) – a strengthening buttress at right angles to a retaining wall, bonded to it to provide stability.

**DIOCESE** (Greek) – the district under the jurisdiction of a bishop.

**DOMINICANS** – members of an order of preaching friars founded by Saint Dominic in South France in 1216 and officially recognized by the pope.

**DOCTRINE** (Latin) – a creed or body of teachings of a religious, political, or philosophical group presented for acceptance or belief.

**DUKE** (French) – a nobleman of the highest order.



**EASTER** – a festival of the Christian Church commemorating the Resurrection of Christ: it falls on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

**ECUMENICAL COUNCIL** – an assembly of ecclesiastics representative of the Christian Church throughout the world. Its decisions are mandatory for the Christian Church throughout the world.

**ERUDITION** (Latin) – having or showing extensive scholarship.

**ESPERANTO** (Spanish) – an international artificial language, invented at the end of the 19th c. by Dr.L.L.Zamenhof, a Polish physician.

**FRANCISCANS** – a member of any of several Christian religious orders of mendicant friars or nuns tracing their origins back to Saint Francis of Assisi.

**GONFALON** (French) – a banner hanging from a crossbar. used in ecclesiastical processions.

**GRAF** (German) – a German count: often used as a title; later a title of nobility in various European countries and Russia.

**GRIFFIN**, or griffon, gryfon, gryphon (Greek) – an imaginary animal with a lion's body and an eagle's beak and wings.

**HERESY** (Greek) – an opinion or doctrine contrary to the orthodox tenets of a religious body or church; apostasy.

**HOLY ORDERS** – the sacrament or rite whereby a person is admitted to the Christian ministry.

**ICONOGRAPHY** (Greek) – the symbols used in a work of art or art movement; the representation of the subjects of icons or portraits.

**ICHERGOUBOIL** – in the Bulgarian khanate, title of the official, ranking third after the khan, who was responsible for the state's internal affairs.

**IDENTITY** (Latin) – the state of being the same in nature, quality;

**INQUISITION** – a judicial institution of the Roman Catholic Church (1232-1820) founded to discover and suppress heresy.

**INVESTITURE** (Latin) – the act of presenting with a title or with the robes and insignia of an office or rank (in feudal society); the formal bestowal of the right to a fief or other benefice.

**ISOLATIONISM** (French) – a policy of nonparticipation in or withdrawal from international affairs.

**KAVKHAN** – in the Bulgarian khanate, title of the official, ranking second after the khan, who performed the duties of Prime Minister.

**KHANATE** – the territory ruled by a khan.

**KING** – a male sovereign prince who is the official ruler of an independent state.

**KNIGHTS HOSPITALLERS** (French) – Also called: Knights of St John of Jerusalem. A military religious order founded about the time of the first crusade (1096-99) among European crusaders. It took its name from a hospital and hostel in Jerusalem.

**LEGATE** (Latin) – an emissary to a foreign state representing the Pope.

**MANICHAISM** or Manicheism – the system of religious doctrines, including elements of Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc., taught by the Persian prophet Mani about the 3rd century A.D.

**METAPHYSICS** (Greek) – the branch of philosophy that deals with first principles, esp. of being and knowing; the philosophical study of the nature of reality, concerned with such questions as the existence of God, the external world, etc.

**MESSIAH** (Hebrew) – in Judaism: the awaited king of the Jews, to be sent by God to free them; or Jesus Christ, when regarded in this role.

**MISSIONARY** (French) – a member of a religious mission.

**MYSTICISM** (Greek) – a system of contemplative prayer and spirituality aimed at achieving direct intuitive experience of the divine.

**ORDAIN** – to consecrate as a priest.

**ORTHODOX CHURCH** – Also called: Byzantine Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Church. The collective body of those Eastern



Churches that were separated from the Western Church in the 11th century and are in communion with the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople.

**PARADOX** (Greek) – a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement that is or may be true.

**PAGAN** (Latin) – a member of a group professing a polytheistic religion or any religion other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

**PAGE** (Italian) – a youth in the personal service of a person of rank, esp. in a royal household.

**PASSOVER** – Also called: Pesach, Pesah, Feast of the Unleavened Bread. An eight-day Jewish festival beginning on Nisan 15 and celebrated in commemoration of the passing over or sparing of the Israelites in Egypt, when God smote the firstborn of the Egyptians.

**PLATONISM** (French) – the teachings of the Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.) and his followers, esp. the philosophical theory that the meanings of general words are real existing abstract entities (Forms) and that particular objects have properties in common by virtue of their relationship with these Forms.

**PLEIAD** (Greek) – a group of brilliant or talented persons.

**PRESBYTER** – an elder of a congregation in the early Christian Church.

**RATIONALISM** (Greek) – the doctrine that knowledge about reality can be obtained by reason alone.

**RAMADHAN** (Arabic) – Rhamadan, or Ramazan: the ninth month of the Muslim year, lasting 30 days, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset.

**RENAISSANCE** (French) – the period of European history marking the waning of the Middle Ages and the rise of the modern world: usually considered as beginning in Italy in the 14th century. Also, the spirit, culture, art, science, and thought of this period. Characteristics of the Renaissance usually include intensified classical scholarship, scientific and geographical discovery, a sense of individual human potentialities, and the assertion of the active and secular over the religious and contemplative.

**RHETORIC** (Greek) – the theory and practice of eloquence, whether spoken or written; the whole art of using language to persuade others.

**SACRAMENT** (Latin) – an outward sign combined with a prescribed form of words which confer some specific grace upon those who receive it. The Protestant sacraments are baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Churches they are baptism, penance, confirmation, the Eucharist, holy orders, matrimony, and the anointing of the sick.

**SANHEDRIN** (Hebrew) – a Jewish council or court, esp. the supreme council and court at Jerusalem.

**SCHISM** (Greek) – division within or separation from an established Church, esp. the Roman Catholic Church, not necessarily involving differences in doctrine.

**SCRIPTORIUM** (Latin) – a room, esp. in a monastery, set apart for the writing or copying of manuscripts.

**SCHOLASTICISM** (Greek) – the system of philosophy, theology, and teaching that dominated medieval western Europe and was based on the writings of the Church Fathers and (from the 12th century) Aristotle.

**SEPARATISM** (French) – advocating or practising secession from an organization or group.

**SECOND COMING** or Advent – the prophesied return of Christ to earth at the Last Judgment, when God will decree the final destinies of all men according to the good and evil in their earthly lives.

**SHAMANISM** – the religion of certain peoples of northern Asia, based on the belief that the world is pervaded by good and evil spirits who can be influenced or controlled only by the shamans; or any similar religion involving forms of spiritualism.

**SPANISH INQUISITION** – the institution that guarded the orthodoxy of Catholicism in Spain, chiefly by the persecution of heretics, Jews, etc., esp. from the 15th to 17th centuries.

**SYNCRETISM** (Greek) – a combination or reconciliation of varying, often mutually opposed



beliefs or practices, esp. those of various religions, into a new conglomerate whole typically marked by internal inconsistencies.

**SYNEDRION** (Greek) – a judicial assembly, a sanhedrin.

**TEMPLAR** – a member of a military religious order (Knights of the Temple of Solomon) founded by Crusaders in Jerusalem around 1118 to defend the Holy Sepulchre and Christian pilgrims.

**TEUTONIC ORDER** – a military and religious order of German knights, priests, and serving brothers founded about 1190 during the Third Crusade, later conquering large parts of the Baltic provinces and Russia. Also called the Teutonic Knights.

**THE LAST JUDGMENT** – the occasion, after the resurrection of the dead at the world's end when, according to Biblical tradition, God will decree the final destinies of all men according to the good and evil in their earthly lives.

**THEOLOGY** (Greek) – the study of religious doctrines and matters of divinity.

**TIARA** (Persian) – a headdress worn by the pope, consisting of a beehive-shaped diadem surrounded by three coronets.

**TOLERANCE** (French) – an ability to consider, even value, diverse points of view, even if they depart from one's own; acceptance of a range or belief; a tendency towards open-mindedness.

**UNION** (Latin) – an association, alliance, or confederation of individuals or groups for a common purpose, esp. political.

**UTOPIA** (Greek) – any real or imaginary society, place, state, etc., considered to be perfect or ideal.

**VANDALISM** – malicious or ignorant destruction of public or private property, often, of that which is beautiful or artistic.



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